

Bible Dramas



WILLIAM FORD MANLEY

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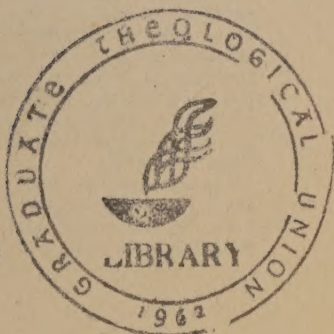
BROADCASTING FROM THE STUDIO

John Knight, Charles Webster and Emma Dunn are shown sending out to the invisible audience one of the dramas in this book.

Bible Dramas

FOR CHURCH AND HOME

By
WILLIAM FORD MANLEY



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PRODUCTION SUGGESTIONS

THE theatre having had its long-ago beginning in the Church, it is not surprising that to-day there is evident an unmistakable and growing interest in dramatic material suitable for Church use. This interest was brought forcibly to the author's attention when, after the production of these Bible Dramas on the radio, he found himself receiving hundreds of letters regarding them.

In preparing these Dramas for publication one point has been kept steadfastly in mind, simplicity for amateur production. *There are no elaborate scenic directions.*

SCENERY. It is the author's conviction that all the Dramas can be clearly, effectively, and dramatically produced before the unpretentious background of a draped curtain. Thus the audience is permitted to supply the scenic details by its own creative imagination. Almost all the settings of the Dramas being interiors, a background of draped curtains carries with it a sufficient note of convincing reality. More ambitious amateur organizations can, of course, find ample opportunity in all the plays for more elaborate scenic treatment.

THE READER. Into all the Dramas a *Reader* is introduced, very much in the manner of the ancient Greek Chorus. The part of the Reader should be played by some one with sure, firm diction; much of the clarity of the Drama depends on him. He should stand, during his reading, either at one side of the stage, or in front of the stage, and on a level with the audience. He should commit the lines to memory, and so avoid destroying the illusion by holding a paper in

front of his audience. The costume should be a simple robe. A graduation robe will be effective for a man, a Grecian robe for a woman.

LIGHTING. Though without some knowledge of the special lighting equipment of the individual church or hall, it is difficult to give definite suggestions, some tested hints can be supplied: For organizations that have a stage equipped with footlights, the problem is already solved.

In producing twilight effects a *dimmer* will be found invaluable. Dimmers are very cheap, and any boy who is used to electrical hook-ups can install one.

A *spotlight* played on a character from the back of the hall adds to the effectiveness of many a scene—such as a solitary figure at prayer (Cain at prayer on the mountain, and David meditating on his palace roof, are good examples). By the use of *gelatin slides* various colour effects can be obtained; a blue slide for representing night, or an amber slide for a warm glow, such as is seen at mid-morning.

In fact, every Drama in this volume can be produced effectively with no other light than that from a back-hall spotlight, using gelatin slides for the different light moods. Persevering experimentation designed to learn how many beautiful effects can be obtained from very little material will be found by the amateur operator a source of delightful and gratifying surprises.

SCENE TRANSITIONS. The author recommends that no curtain be used between the scenes of the Dramas. By momentarily turning off the stage lights, and then shifting the light to the Reader, the characters will readily be able to get off or on the stage, or to assume new positions for the coming scene.

The shifting of light is very easy to do. Suppose a spotlight is used to light the stage; at the end of the scene the light is switched off, and the stage goes black. At once another light is played on the Reader, who stands on one side of the stage. When the reading is completed, the light is switched off from the Reader, and the stage-light switched on. A little practice before the production will guarantee a smooth, effective light scheme. Of course, a curtain can be used, and more ambitious organizations, with well-equipped stages, may prefer it. But before you use a curtain, try out the light scheme outlined above, and see how simple, smooth, and effective it can be made.

COSTUMES. For men costumes should be the conventional short robes characteristic of the time in which the scenes are laid. For women beautiful flowing costumes can be made from cheesecloth, and dyed to any colour grouping desired. Never forget that light shows up to its best advantage on colour; dead white and drab brown are not effective colour schemes.

Entrances and exits are very simple. One entrance place—a parting in the curtains—is ample. This parting in the curtains should be open; thus the actor can avoid fumbling with folds of cloth.

The Dramas are written, for the most part, in metre—iambic pentameter—but it should not be forgotten that the metre must not be read or spoken in too strongly an accented way. Recite naturally. Read for the meaning. The metre will help your diction, and make your task much easier than if you were reading prose. But do not be too conscious that you are reading metrical verse. When you can read it so that it sounds like very smoothly flowing prose, then you are doing an effective piece of dramatic reading.

JAMES OF GALILEE

SCENES: ALL IN THE HOUSE OF JAMES

Announcer: Centuries ago on the shore of the Lake of Galilee lived a humble fisherman, James the son of Zebedee. For many years the routine of his life had been the same: rising at dawn, putting forth onto the lake, returning at twilight with the day's catch, drying and mending the nets. At home his wife, Esther, followed a routine of her own, sewing, weaving, preparing the frugal meals, and tending to the needs of their children.

Now, one evening, when James had returned from his day's fishing, and the evening meal was over, Esther came into the little home, bearing water from the well, and noticed her husband sitting very quietly, staring into the twilight.

Esther: What are you looking for, James?

James (looking through window): There's a man down there by the boats. I wonder if he's looking for me?

Esther: If he is, let him come up here. Hm-m, I see him now. He's ragged enough to be a beggar.

James: He doesn't look like a beggar.

Esther: There! He's going away down the shore. I'm glad of it, too. I don't trust people who have nothing to do but walk around looking at other people's boats. Just as likely as not, he means to steal one when it's dark enough.

James: He didn't look like a thief.

Esther: I saw him this morning, and I tell you I suspected him then!

James: Why?

Esther: Well, he was standing—looking, looking out to sea—just the way you were doing when I came in—and in the middle of the morning, when honest people are at work!

James: He may have work, for all that we know.

Esther: Work! Wandering up and down the shore? Huh, if that's work— There! You're staring again. James, what's the matter with you this evening? You've been so quiet—and you've hardly spoken to me.

James: I—I was thinking.

Esther: Thinking! At this time of night I'm too tired to think. I should think you would be, too. There! Let's light the light, and you'll feel more cheerful. You should be cheerful, with the good catch you made to-day. You haven't done so well for weeks! And I'm sure it came just in time, with all the mouths you have to feed!

James: Esther, you mustn't be vexed with me if I just sit here quietly—

Esther: It's not very pleasant for me.

James: I know it's not. I just can't help myself to-night.

Esther: What is the matter with you?

James: I don't know. I don't know myself.

Esther: You're tired, dear. You need to rest. I won't talk to you.

James: No. I wish you would. I wish I could talk to you. I wish I could tell you—everything that's seething round inside of me.

Esther: Why, you're talking wildly.

James: It's so hard to explain. I don't know that you'd understand—

Esther: I've understood you for a good many years. I've tried to, James—

James: I know that. But this is something—something different. The trouble is, I don't know what it is myself—that is, I can't put my finger on it, and—

Esther: Well, you can try.

James: It's like this: Sometimes when I'm out there on the lake, alone—at dawn, or at twilight, when everything is very still, and the lake so quiet you hardly dare to dip an oar in it—and you see the lights of the village on the shore—and you hear voices; mothers calling their children, and laughter, sometimes quarrelling—you begin to wonder if this is everything; working, sleeping—dying—whether there isn't something beyond all this, something very beautiful that none of us see. Something we catch a glimpse of, perhaps, for just a moment—and then lose.

Esther: Well, James, if that's all you're thinking about—! Why, sometimes I have thoughts like that. But where would we all come to if we let it worry us? We're here for something, and we do what there is to do. Ha, ha! You'd better turn beggar, James, like that fellow we saw by the shore, and then you'll have plenty of time to think, and—

James: Esther, don't laugh at me! I couldn't stand

that to-night. I'd rather have you angry. Don't you think I've tried to get rid of these thoughts? Why, I tell you sometimes I've picked up my oars and rowed, and rowed until I dropped down exhausted, just to escape from them—to stifle them with fatigue. But they come back. They come back.

Esther: Well, James, I suppose that as long as you catch enough fish to support your family, you're entitled to think anything you wish to; only I wish you'd do your thinking out on the lake; because, really, it makes the house very gloomy to have you do it here. Perhaps I do a little thinking on my own account, when you're safely out of the way—but I try to have a smile for you when you come home.

James: You're a good women, Esther; and I'm beginning to think there's something wrong with me. But the trouble is this: I'm not gloomy, and they're not depressing thoughts. No. Sometimes I'm exalted, as though I had discovered the secret to everything—and then it eludes me, and I come right back to where I started, working, laughing, dying— Isn't there something else?

Esther: There's bed, and I think you'd better go there, because you have an early start and a long day ahead of you.

James: Yes, I know.

Zebedee (off): Hullo—Hullo, James—

Esther: There's your father. Don't let him keep you up too late. You know what it's like when he starts talking!

[*Knocking.*]

Come in, Father Zebedee— [Enter ZEBEDEE.]

Zebedee: I hoped I'd find you up, James.

Esther: He's very tired, father.

Zebedee: Tut, tut! The evening's still young. You can't put me off that way. What's life good for, if all you do is get up and go to bed? Somehow to-night I feel as young as a boy!

Esther: You haven't been working all day; James has.

Zebedee: You see, I've been talking to the most—a most unusual man. I don't know when I've met a person who seemed to—why, you can't help loving him! I was sitting on the shore, and everything looked very gloomy. I was very angry at Simon, for selling me a coat at too high a price, and every moment I was getting more and more angry, and thinking up ways to get even with Simon; and this man came along. And I don't know what it is that he said; in fact, I can't seem to remember anything that he did say. Just simple talk—the weather, people, 'n that sort of thing. But all of a sudden I felt—well, I felt rid of my anger, and I felt like smiling and— You know, he smiled. I think it was his smile that—that did something to me—I seemed to understand how ridiculous my anger was.

Esther: You're talking just like James, Father Zebedee. I'll leave you two alone together, because I've got my work to do to-morrow, and I can't sit up all night and talk. Good-night. And James, you have to start early to-morrow. [*Exit ESTHER.*]

Zebedee: James—

James: Yes, father.

Zebedee: What are you so quiet for?

James: Nothing, father.

Zebedee: Weren't you listening to me?

James: Yes, I heard you. I'd like to feel that way, too; rid of everything that bothers me—understanding

everything that gnaws at me. I'd like to meet a man whose smile would do that for me.

Zebedee: Been quarrelling?

James: No, father.

Zebedee: I just wondered. What did she mean, talking just like you?

James: Oh, before you came in, we were talking. I'm afraid Esther thinks I'm discontented with her—with my home, with my work, with everything—

Zebedee: Well, James, we all get discouraged.

James: It's not that. I'm not discouraged. But didn't you ever feel that this isn't everything, this waking and sleeping, working, raising children,—didn't you ever catch a glimpse of something—I don't know how to tell you, but—

Zebedee: Yes, I've felt that way, too, son. A good many times—but that was years and years ago. When you're as old as I am, you'll just accept things—you won't go on questioning and seeking, because it's too hard, and a man gets tired as the years pile on him. Yes, tired.

James: But I must seek, father; I must! I must go on—eager, unsatisfied, harassed—tortured even! Questioning what it is that lies beyond this flesh of mine; the thing that gives flashes of its beauty to me—and then is gone.

Zebedee: Take my advice, James. It will bring you nothing but heartaches, this questioning of yours. I've been through it—and I know. Take things as they come. Accept—don't question. Nobody is going to come along to answer your questions. You can be sure of that.

Esther: James—

Zebedee: There—she's calling. I know what that means. She wants me to go. Remember what I said,

son. Nobody's going to answer your questions—and you'll never find out for yourself. Good night.

[*Curtain.*]

SCENE II

Announcer: The night passes, and at dawn James goes down to his boat, to make it ready for the day's fishing. Esther finds herself alone, for as soon as breakfast is over the children have scampered out of the house into the early morning sunlight. Busy with her housework, she hears a knock on the door, and a cheery voice calling, "Good morning."

Esther: There! As though there were nothing to do but to come visiting at this time in the morning! Yes, Father Zebedee, what is it? [*Enter ZEBEDEE.*]

Zebedee: Oh, it's nothing particular. Just good morning to you.

Esther: You won't mind if I just go on working?

Zebedee: Not at all, Esther. I enjoy seeing people work.

Esther: James started yet?

Zebedee: No. He's talking to a man down on the shore.

Esther: Well! That's not like him. He's usually the first man out on the lake. He'll lose his place on the fishing ground.

Zebedee: Oh, there's lots of lake, Esther. And you know—that man he's talking to—

Esther: Why, it's that beggar! And the children! (*Calls.*) Children! Come here at once.

Zebedee: They don't hear you, Esther.

Esther: Father! You go right down and tell them I want them to come back to the house. Why—

Zebedee: Let 'em stay where they are. They're not coming to any harm.

Esther: Why, look! They're in his lap and—and James is sitting there with his mouth open, as though he'd lost his wits!

Zebedee: Esther, you go down there, too, and you won't come home.

Esther: I will go down! And I'll bring the children home, since you won't. And I'll give James a good scolding. Why, look! All the other boats are out, and he's still sitting!

Zebedee: Esther, James is coming back here to the house.

Esther: So he is! And that beggar—he's got in James' boat! And the children are smiling—and waving their hands at him—

Zebedee: Esther, he has a gentle face.

Esther: I never judge people by the way they look. I don't understand why they keep crowding round him—unless he's giving them something—

Zebedee: He's telling them a story; see, they're smiling—and nodding their heads.

Esther: Well, I'll say one thing: I never saw them stand so still for so long. They won't listen to me.

[*Enter JAMES.*]

James: Esther—

Esther: Well, James—why aren't you out on the lake? All the other boats have started.

James: I'm not fishing this morning.

Esther: Not fishing! What do you mean?

James: I'm going to take that man across the lake.

Esther: Is he going to pay you?

James: I didn't ask him.

Esther: Well! I don't think you have the time to go rowing people across the lake for nothing!

James: He has to go to the other shore—and he asked me to take him.

Esther: And you just said, yes?

James: There's no one else to take him—and he says he must go—and that it's important—

Esther: He hasn't anything important to do! Why, look at him—does he look like a man who has important things to do?

James: He told me it's on his father's business—and I'm going to take him, Esther.

Esther: And miss a day's fishing?

James: I'll work late into the night.

Zebedee: Ha, ha, Esther! I told you there was something about that man!

Esther: Well, I wish he'd never come here! I think he's cast a spell on you both—

Zebedee: And on the children, too, Esther.

Esther: What are you doing, James!

James: He needs food. I am getting him some.

Esther: Why, we have hardly enough for ourselves!

James: We have enough to share with him.

Esther: Shall we feed every beggar that comes along?

James: This man is no common beggar!

Esther: Has he turned your head by promising you a great sum for rowing him across the lake?

James: He has promised me nothing.

Esther: Why—*why* are you doing this for him?

James: He asked me. That is all.

Esther: Take him, then—if you have the time to spare from your work; if we have so much you can give it away; if you wish to come back to-night empty-

handed, and eat a crust of bread; for there'll be nothing else if you give your day to this beggar. And nothing else for me and for the children— If you want to put this man before us—

James: Don't reproach me. I mean to take him across the lake. I shall be back at nightfall.

[*Exit JAMES.*]

Esther: James!

Zebedee: He's gone, Esther. No use trying to call him back. He's made up his mind. I can tell by the look of him.

Esther: What's come over him? I can't understand—I can't understand.

SCENE III

Announcer: James takes the stranger across the lake, and returns at twilight. The journey has consumed more time than he expected, and he has had no time to lower his nets. In the morning he picks up again the routine of his fishing. Several days pass. Again we come upon the little house at twilight. Esther is waiting, for James has not returned from his work, and she looks through the open door in the hope that she may see his sail rounding the point—

Zebedee (entering): Any sign of him?

Esther: No. All the other boats are in. He's hardly ever been so late as this. Why, the children had been in bed for an hour—and his supper's been on the table so long it's cold!

Zebedee: Don't worry. He'll be along soon.

Esther: What is keeping him!

Zebedee: There! Don't worry. He knows his way home.

Esther: Father Zebedee—

Zebedee: Yes?

Esther: James has been different the last day or two. Haven't you noticed it?

Zebedee: No. I can't say that I have.

Esther: He's been so gentle with me and with the children. I suppose he's felt bad for having wasted a day rowing that beggar across the lake—and now he's making up for it. Do you know, the children are always asking about that man—when he's coming back. They don't seem to forget him.

Zebedee: I know. They're always asking me, and I don't know what to tell them. Funny, their remembering him.

Esther: You know what the little one calls him, Father Zebedee? "The Kind Man." Strange, a child saying that.

Zebedee: The baby said that? Why—why, that just about describes him. The Kind Man. Well, well! I never should have thought of that, and yet it's perfect. Children sometimes hit the truth.

Esther: Oh, I wish James would come home! It's getting so dark, and there's a wind rising on the lake.

Zebedee: Oh, don't worry.

Esther: Listen! You can hear the waves beating on the shore.

Zebedee: James has a stout boat.

Esther: Oh, father, sometimes when I look out on that dark lake I think: "What if he should not come back to me? What if I should lose him?"

Zebedee: There—you're not going to lose him; don't work yourself up.

Esther: Men are lost out yonder.

Zebedee: Not good sailors like James.

Esther: Look, father—look! Is that a sail out there in the dark?

Zebedee: Looks like a ghost, doesn't it?

Esther: It's his boat. (*Calls.*) James!

Zebedee: He can't hear you. There's too much wind.

Esther: I see it now. He's made the landing. There! I shouldn't have worried.

Zebedee: I told you so all along.

Esther: I'll have to get wood for the fire—there's none here. If he's damp and cold tell him there's a warm coat behind the door.

Zebedee: You go and get the wood. I'll tell him.

[*Exit ESTHER; a pause, then JAMES enters.*]

Well, James, Esther was getting worried about you. Better change your coat—you're soaking wet.

James: Where's Esther?

Zebedee: She's fetching wood.

James: Father—

Zebedee: What's the trouble? Why, James! You look on fire with something! Like a man who's seen a vision!

James: Father, I have!

Zebedee: Have what?

James: Seen a vision!

Zebedee: James, you'll frighten Esther—looking so, so wild—

James: Oh, father, I have something to tell her, and yet I hardly dare—and yet I must—to-night—now—

Zebedee: Bad news?

James: Is it bad news when a man finds that for which he has been looking?

Zebedee: She's coming, James. Why, you look tortured! What is this thing you must tell her?

James: Something that she will not understand,

for all her love of me—something that no one will understand.

Zebedee: What has happened to you out there on the lake?

James: I have found—God.

Zebedee: Found God? You're mad, James—talking this way. Get into your coat, and talk like a reasonable man. She's at the door. Get hold of yourself, man! [Enter ESTHER.]

Esther: James, my dear—you were so late, and the night was so dark, and the storm rising in the east, and the waves on the shore—I was worried. But you're here now. Safe. There. I have you again—

[Takes JAMES in her arms.]

James: Father, will you leave us?

Zebedee: I'll go, James, but don't say things you're going to be sorry for. Don't worry her any more by talking wild, as you did to me. Good night, my boy!

James: Good night, father. [Exit ZEBEDEE.]

Esther: He's gone. I'm glad of it. We're alone together.

James: Esther, I must tell you something—

Esther: Why do you look at me as though your heart were torn?

James: It is.

Esther: Put by your worries. Is there no peace for you here after the fretful day?

James (to himself): I must tell her now!

Esther: James, why do you mutter and stare at me wildly?

James: Do you believe that I love you?

Esther: I do. Why should I doubt? Because we sometimes quarrel? Those things are forgotten.

James: Perhaps you will doubt when I tell you—

Esther: You frighten me!

James: I—I must leave you.

Esther: Leave me? I don't understand.

James: I must make you understand!

Esther: How can you, when your eyes are full of such a strange wild light?

James: This afternoon—late—just before twilight, I put into shore, and a man came towards my boat, calling my name. The selfsame man I carried across the lake.

Esther: That man again! Does he want you to take him across again, and at this hour of night?

James: Esther, listen—listen to me. As I stood there, he approached close to me, and laid his hand upon my shoulder, and as I felt his hand upon my arm I seemed to faint, as though with a great weakness, and I heard his voice, as in a dream: "James, son of Zebedee, lay down your net, and follow me."

Esther: Follow him—where?

James: I do not know. I did not ask. I answered: "Yes, master."

Esther: "Master"—to a beggar?

James: I tell you he is no beggar!

Esther: What is his name?

James: I do not know his name. I only know he comes from Nazareth.

Esther: You're following this Nazarene—this man who—

James: He is not man. He—

Esther: James, James! Now I know. You're mad!

James: No. Now I see all things clearly.

Esther: Clearly! I see them, too! You hate me, or you wouldn't leave me.

James: I love you, for now I know what love means.

Esther: Don't you dare to speak of love! Deserting me—and your children—have you thought of that?

James: I have thought of that.

Esther: James, it isn't true! Tell me it isn't. You are—are making this up, and in a moment you'll laugh—you'll hold me in your arms—

James: He has called me, and I must follow him wheresoever he may lead me.

Esther: No. I cannot believe you. Look—look at that room where your children are sleeping. Look there, and tell me you're leaving us! You can't.

James: Perhaps they will understand; perhaps they will understand—for they, too, call him Master and love him.

Esther: Are you mad? Am I dreaming? Yes! Tomorrow the sun will be shining, the children will hold your hands—we'll wave good-bye as you set sail for the day's work and—

James: Esther, don't you—can't you—understand? I have been called to another work—to make people see the light I have seen.

Esther: The light? You are only bringing darkness to my heart. Where is this man?

James: He is outside, waiting for me.

Esther: I will speak to him!

James: Yes, yes—perhaps you will understand—

Esther: I'll drive him—

James: Wait—I hear a hand upon the door—

[*Knocking.*]

Esther: Yes! Come in!

James: Esther—

Esther: I will not be silent! [*Knocking again.*]

Open the door, James. Open the door!

[JAMES *opens the door. A great light floods the room.*]

James: Master—

Esther: James—the light—the light on his face!—

James: He motions to me—

Esther: And your face, my husband—there is a light upon your face! It fills me with wonder and with fear—

James: He goes. I must follow.

Esther: But you will come back to me?

James: Yes. I will come back. [Exit JAMES.]

Esther: They are gone. Oh, my husband—my children! Now I understand you. It was the face of God.

CAIN AND ABEL

CHARACTERS: CAIN WOMAN
 ABEL VOICE OF GREED
 VOICE OF CONSCIENCE

SCENES: 1. ON THE MOUNTAIN
 2. IN THE FIELD
 3. ON THE MOUNTAIN
 4. IN THE FIELD
 5. IN THE HILLS: CAIN ALONE

SCENE I

Announcer: Now, Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. . . . And it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruits of the ground (for) an offering to the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock. . . . And the Lord had respect unto Abel and his offering; but unto Cain and his offering He had no respect. . . . And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. . . .

And so the seed of hate was planted in the heart of Cain; and he carries this new-born hate with him as he climbs up the mountain-side to offer the fruits of his labour as a sacrifice to the Lord. On and on he climbs, until the highest crag is reached; then he pauses to look down upon the valley below him, where, amid his sheep, his brother Abel plays his shepherd's pipe. The sun rises, flooding the new-born world with light. But the heart of Cain is in shadow as he turns to pray.

Cain:

What is this bitterness that gnaws within?
What is this voice that will not give me rest?
That seems to whisper to mine inmost heart
And fills me with a strange new discontent?
Lo, I have prayed for peace, yet all my prayers
Fall on my ears an empty mockery!
Lo, I have brought the first-fruits of my field
And offered them as sacrifice to God.
But He hath turned His face away from me.
What have I done that God hears not my voice?
O Thou Lord God, show me Thy bounty now!
Increase my fields, and give me what I ask:
A life of ease such as my brother knows.
For all day long he sits among his flock,
Watches the clouds, and idles through the day,
Playing his rustic pipe, while I, his brother—
I, Cain, first-born of all the sons of men—
Must labour through the parching heat of day,
Must plow the stubborn ground that yields the
fruit

That I do pay for with my very blood!
Let me have rest; let me have plenty, too!
Hear Thou my prayer, O Lord; turn not away!
But see all that I bring to please Thine eyes—
The first-fruits of my field. Accept my prayer.

[*Pause.*]

God hears me not. What have I done that I
Should be forgotten? Oh, be still my tongue
And cease thy bitterness. And thou, my heart,
Turn not against my brother. Answer me,
Answer my prayer!

O God! [*A pause.*] He is silent!
He hears me not. He hears me not.

SCENE II

Announcer: Cain's prayer falls mockingly upon his own ears—a prayer of discontent, a prayer that springs from the envy in his heart. The mountain is still. The sky is empty of any cloud. Cain turns his face towards the valley—the valley where he must toil in his fields, whilst his brother Abel sits at ease and guards his flocks. And as Cain goes down from the mountain the bitterness in his heart goes with him.

Meanwhile, as Cain hurries towards the valley, Abel is sitting among his flock watching a woman who is coming slowly across the meadow towards him; and as she draws near to the shepherd she calls—

Woman: Abel—Abel—

[*Enter ABEL.*]

Abel: Yes, mother?

Woman:

Where is thy brother Cain?

Abel:

I do not know,

Albeit I saw him at the break of day

Moving with hasty steps across the fields

As though he journeyed to the mountain yonder.

Woman:

'Tis strange that at the very time of harvest

He thus should leave his labour. Didst ask him
why?

Abel:

I spoke to him, but he did answer not.

Woman:

Answered not? What may this mean, my son?

Abel:

I do not know.

Woman: Has there been any quarrel—

Abel:

None that I know of—and yet when I did greet
him

He only gave an angry scowl—and fled
As though some devil gnawed within his heart.

Woman:

Didst seek to stop him?

Abel:

I called aloud: "O Cain, where goest thou?"
But he did turn, and scaled the mountain-side,
And answer to my question gave he none.

Woman:

'Tis strange.

Abel: What may this mean, O mother?

If I have sinned unknowingly against him,
Why, tell me, and I'll go and ask forgiveness.

Woman:

Alas, my son—

I fear thy brother Cain, I know not why.

Abel:

One night he came, a cloud upon his brow.
I sat here with my sheep; he came so still
I thought he was a wolf, and drew my staff—
And then he laughed—a laugh that made me cold!
"Ha, Abel! Would'st thou strike me where I
stand?"

I spoke to him to put his heart at rest.

"Give me a lamb!" he said. "Give me a lamb!

Out of thy rich abundance give me one

Or I shall *take* it!" And I gave him one.

He went his way, without a word of thanks.

And late last night he came again, and said:

"Give of thy sheep—I, too, would have a flock!"

And I replied: "Thou hast thy fields, my brother.

To thee the crops, the grain; to me the sheep."
And then he scowled and whispered in my ear.
" *I hate thee.*" And he went upon his way.

Woman:

What means that word?

Abel: What word, mother?

Woman: "Hate"?

Abel:

I know it not.

Woman: It is some evil thing.

A prophecy of evil yet to come!

A prophecy of woe for all my sons!

And all their sons that follow after them.

Abel:

"Hate—hate." It has a fearful sound!

Woman:

But stay! Here comes thy brother 'cross the
fields.

Speak gently to him, Abel—Cain, my son—

[*Enter CAIN.*]

My first-born—welcome!

Cain:

Aye, mother—first-born and first-forgotten!

Woman: Say not so!

Thou hast a place of love within my heart.

Cain:

I am but Cain—a grubber in the fields!

I have no flock. I sweat beneath the sun.

Mine is the toil; and my reward is—what?

More labour on the morrow—aye, ever more
labour!

While this sweet shepherd of thine sits at his ease,
And though he toils no more than yonder rock,
He, forsooth, grows rich and sleek withal!

Woman:

Cain—my son—beware! Beware this thing
That eats into thy heart! Beware the fruit
That comes when love is gone! Beware the scowl
That lines thy face! O Cain, beware this *hate*!
This new-born evil thing that speaks to thee!

Cain:

I knew *thou* wert against me—to speak thus!

Woman:

I do not know thee. There is in thy face
A look which I have never seen before!
I fear thee, Cain! I fear this “hate” of thine.

Cain:

Begone! This shepherd Abel has thy love.

Woman:

It is not so!

Cain: I know it is! Begone! [Exit WOMAN.]

Abel:

Cain, my brother, why doest thou frown at me?

Cain:

Give to me of thy flock!

Abel:

They are my own.

For I have raised them from the tiny lamb,
And nurtured them by day, and watched by night.
Even as thou hast worked among thy fields,
So have I laboured here among my flock.

Cain:

Laboured! A fie upon such labour as thine!

Abel:

Well, if thy life is hard—so is *mine* hard!
Thou dost not know the terror of the wolf
That comes to snatch the lamb from out the fold.
Thou hast not gone into the hills at night
When all the stars have put their tapers out,

And darkness cloaks the lonely mountain-side,
When I with straining eyes and fearful heart
Must search and search for the forsaken lamb
And bring it safely home. No! Thy lot
Is no more hard than mine! Why should I give
My sheep to thee?

Cain: Give to me of thy flock!

Abel:

Go thou and ask forgiveness of thy God.
Here! Now I give to thee two lambs. Go forth
And sacrifice, that there may still be peace
Between thy heart and mine. Farewell, my brother.

[*Exit ABEL. A VOICE is heard, whispering from
the nearby shadows.*]

Voice: Cain! Cain!

Cain: What is that voice?

Voice: Thy inmost voice, Cain. The voice of thy
secret desire.

Cain: What wilt thou say to me?

Voice: Look, Cain! See the scorn upon thy brother's
face! He smiles at thee from afar, and mocks thee.

Cain: Be still, thou evil voice; be still!

Voice: Cain, thou couldst have *all* his flock!

Cain: Tempt me not again!

Voice: Thou couldst have many lambs! Wilt thou,
the first-born, labour in the fields, when *he* lives on the
fat of the land?

Cain: Oh, do not torment me!

Voice: I can bring thee *wealth*.

Cain: Be still! Be still!

Voice: Why shouldst thou labour when thou canst
take what is his and make it thine *own*? Thou art
strong, Cain! Stronger than thy brother. Take what
thou wilt.

Cain: I do not listen to thee!

Voice: Aye, thou wilt. Thou must. Look, Cain, how thy brother sits afar among his flock—and smiles with scorn upon thee!

Cain: He smiles with love for me!

Voice: With *hate*! With *HATE*! Hate thou *him* also.

Cain: Hate—that word again! It eats my heart! I have no rest! Oh, let me go unto the mountains, and seek my God!

SCENE III

Announcer: Cain leaves his fields and goes into the mountains to offer sacrifice; and the voice in the heart of Cain goes with him also. [CAIN *kneels in prayer.*]

Cain:

Again, O Lord, do I come unto Thee!

Again do I offer up my supplication!

Lord God who made me!

Lord God have mercy upon me!

Be not silent, like Thy mountains,

But speak unto me.

Voice (off, in the shadows): I will speak to thee, Cain.

Cain: Who—art—thou?

Voice: The voice of thy desire.

Cain: That voice again! Oh, torment me not!

Voice: Listen—Cain—

Cain: I know thee not!

Voice: I am thy inmost thought, and thy heart's desire.

Cain: I desire peace! Torment me no more, but let me speak to my God!

Voice: First thou must cast *me* from thy heart, ere thy God will hearken unto thee.

Cain: I *will* cast thee out, thou evil voice of torment!

Voice: Thou canst not cast me out.

Cain: *What* art thou, O secret voice of torment?

Voice: Jealousy—thine own.

Cain: No!

Voice: Greed—thine own!

Cain: O Lord God, silence this voice!

Voice: *He* will not answer thee—so hearken unto me. For I am with thee always. I am in the heat of thy blood. I am most dear to thee. Thou wilt not give me up for *any* God! I am—

Cain: Close thou my ears, O Lord!

Voice: He hears thee not. Cain, Cain! Follow me. All that is thy brother's shall be *thine*!

Cain: He loves me.

Voice: No! Listen, Cain. To-night—when he sleeps among his sheep— It will be dark. No one shall see—

Cain: Oh, God—defend me!

Voice: *He* hears thee not.

Cain: Lo, I have cried out unto the Lord, and He is deaf unto me. He hears not my supplication, nor shows His mercy unto the agony of my heart.

Voice: I will comfort thee.

Cain: O Lord, why should I follow Thee when Thou wilt have none of me? [*There comes a low rumbling as of thunder.*] The Lord speaks in the voice of His thunder! I hear a voice—a voice that speaks to me as from the heavens: "Cain, Cain! *Cast sin from out thine heart. GO THOU TO THY BROTHER WITH LOVE!*"

Voice: Do not listen! I can give thee wealth. I can

give thee pleasure! [*The thunder rumbles again.*]

Cain: I hear Thee, Lord. I—I cannot pray. There is some guilty thing within me, a voice that will not down. I cannot pray. My tongue is stopped.

Voice: Cain, Cain! Follow me.

Cain: That voice! That voice that seems to come from in my heart! Pleasure! Wealth! All that is my brother's can be mine. I am stronger than he. Why should I slave in the fields? I am stronger than he! I am *Cain!* I am the first-born! His flock is mine by right—and I shall have it!

SCENE IV

Announcer: “And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.” Cain now turns his back on the mountain and the voice of the Lord, and returns to the valley; and the voice in the heart of Cain returns with him. The scene is laid in a field, where Abel watches his flock, as the night approaches.

[*Music of ABEL's pipe.*]

Abel:

Gather round me, my flock. The day grows dim.
The sun has spent his course and sleeps again.
Yielding the sky to the care of wandering stars.
See now the moon adventures out once more.
This is the hour when wolves are in the fields,
And danger lurks within the shadows grey.
Gather round me, my flock. Thou baby lambs,
I shall protect ye. Nestle at my feet.
Fear not the wolves that bay against the moon.
My staff shall be thy guardian through the night.
Lo! The dog snarls, even at my feet!

Who cometh through the night so silently?
It is a wolf. Ho! Get thee hence,
Or I shall turn the dogs upon thee now!

[*A sound of low growling.*]

Be still, thou faithful dogs! I see no wolf,
And yet thy snarling tells me one is there.
Methought I heard a step—yes! There again!
Speak! Who art thou, to come so secretly?

Cain (off):

Abel!

Abel: Show me thy face!

Cain (off): Thou knowest me!

I am the one for whom thou hast great scorn.

Abel:

Come! Let me see thee!

Cain (off): Thou dost know my voice?

Abel:

I know it not. It filleth me with fear.

[*Enter CAIN.*]

Cain:

I am thy brother—Cain! Hated by thee!

Abel:

I know not *hate*. I know it not!

Cain: Thou dost!

Abel:

Speak not in such an angry accent now.

This very morn I gave to thee two lambs—

Why art thou angry at me?

Cain: Say no more!

Abel:

Thou comest like a wolf, to harm my flock,
And I shall guard them to the very end!

Cain:

Thine end hath come.

Abel: What mean those words, my brother?

Cain:

Give me thy flock, or thou shalt see!

Abel:

Cain, why dost thou linger in the dark?

Come hither. Let us speak with gentleness.

Cain:

Leave me thy flock!

Abel: O Cain! I see thee now!

Cain: Put down thy staff! I hate thee, Abel! I hate thee from my soul!

Abel: I love thee, Cain, but I love not thy rage.

Cain: Put down thy staff, or I shall strike at thee.

Abel: Wouldst have me stand aside, and let thee prey upon my flock?

Cain: Beware my rage!

Abel: I fear it not!

Cain: Stand thou aside!

Abel: No!

Cain: Then save thyself and sheep as best thou may.

[*There is a blow. ABEL falls.*]

Cain: What—have—I—done?

Voice (in the shadows): Cain, Cain! Take thou his sheep.

Cain: He is still. He moves not! Abel—my brother—speak to me!

Voice: It is too late. It is too late.

Cain: Speak to me, Abel!

Voice: His voice is gone forever. He is dead.

Cain: Dead!

Voice: Thou hast murdered him. Now take thy reward and go thy way.

Cain: Murder!

Voice:

The first murder—but not the last. Forget him,
Cain.

Harden thy heart. From now on God will hear
thee not.

Henceforth thou art alone. Only *I* am with thee.

Cain:

Oh, cursed voice!

Voice:

From now the hand of every man is turned against
thee.

Thine own *mother* shall look upon thee and curse
thee.

Only I shall be thy comfort.

SCENE V

Announcer: Cain, leaving his brother Abel dead in the field, takes his flock, goes into the hills. But not alone. Another voice goes with him—the voice of conscience.
[CAIN *alone.*]

Cain:

Mine—all mine! No more for me the toil
Of endless days beneath a burning sun!
I meant no harm, but he did raise his staff
To threaten me—and so I struck him down.
It was *his* fault—not mine. I shall forget
His face, his eyes upraised to mine, his blood—
His innocent blood—O God, forgive my sin!
I would forget—but I cannot forget!
And everywhere I look I see his face,
His eyes were gentle—love was on his tongue—
His hand stretched forth to greet me. Let me
forget!

Voice (another VOICE, stern and clear): Cain, thou canst never forget.

Cain: Who art *thou*?

Voice: The voice of thy conscience, Cain.

Cain: I know thee not!

Voice: Thou wilt know me all the rest of thy days. I will give thee no peace and no comfort.

Cain: I shall not listen to thee!

Voice: Thou must. For thou hast done that which cannot be easily forgiven—and thou must suffer.

Cain: I have suffered enough! Ten days have I wandered, and found no peace.

Voice: There shall be no peace for thee or for thy kind.

Cain: Cease, O evil voice!

Voice: Cain, thou hast committed murder—and the blood of thy brother is upon thy head.

Cain: It is, it is! But that is done—

Voice: Aye, that is done. But from thy deed, O Cain, shall spring the seeds of war.

Cain: War—what is war?

Voice: Murder, even as thine; brother against brother—friend against friend—nation against nation.

Cain: Oh, is this the seed of my hand?

Voice: Aye, thou hast sown a dreadful seed—the seed of hate—and the fruit thereof is bitter.

Cain: Torment me not, O Voice of Conscience! (*There is a rumble as of thunder, loud and accusing*) Again—the thunder!

Voice: Listen to the voice of thy God! Now must thou answer. Cain! He asks thee, “Where is Abel, thy brother?” Answer *Him*!

Cain: I know not!

Voice: Thou *must* answer! [*The thunder rumbles.*]

Cain: Am *I* my brother's keeper?

Voice: Thou *art* thy brother's keeper. The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto thee from the ground!

Cain: Oh, let me flee this torment!

Voice: Thou canst not flee from thy sin! It will follow thee. [*Thunder.*]

Cain: O God! My punishment is more than I can bear!

Voice: Thy punishment is but beginning!

Cain: Where shall I find peace?

Voice: There is no peace for those who kill!

Cain: Must I suffer these torments until the end of my life?

Voice: Thou must suffer—and thy children after thee, for thou hast brought *murder* upon the earth.

Cain: O thou voice of torment! Be still!

Voice: Not so, Cain! I will torment thee forever.

[*A shrill cry of grief off-stage.*]

Cain: What is that cry of pain?

Voice: It is the voice of woman, whose seed thou slayest! thy mother hath found her dead.

Cain: Oh, let me hide from the face of man! Let me flee unto the hills!

Voice: There *is* no peace for thee!

[*The wind screams.*]

Cain: I hear the accusation in the voice of the wind! It seems to say—" *Cain! thou hast innocent blood upon thy hands!* " The air is full of voices that cry out—*murder!* Accuse me not! Accuse me not!

Voice: Come, Cain! Rise up! I will show thee what awful harvest shall grow from the seed thou didst plant.

Cain: Show me no more! (*Low rumble of drums.*) What is that noise?

Voice: The drums of war!

Cain: *War!* It hath a fearful sound. Whence comes that rumbling?

Voice:

The drums of war—the drums of death and pain!

This the seed of thy hand!

This thy harvest, Cain!

Cain:

War—and hate—and death—

Voice:

War and death and pain—

Where the slayer dies with the slain;

Lo, women shall cry for their dead,

And the lamps be lit in vain!

For *War* will take its toll,

And leave the dead with the dead;

No more for them the sun—

Theirs the steel and the lead—

A furrow in the ground,

And the darkness all around!

Cain:

Be still, O Prophetic Voice!

Voice:

Brother against brother!

Friend against friend!

Thou, Cain—art the Beginning—

[*The drums beat more powerfully.*]

But *this* is the End!

This is thy handiwork,

This is thy seed!

The fruit of thy *Hate*—

The harvest of Greed!

Cain:

Oh, let men forget my name, for I am accursed!

Voice:

Thou wilt not be forgotten.

Thy praise shall sound again;

Thou art the father of War;

Thou art the author of pain!

[*Guns.*]

Hark, Cain! The guns of war!

*Hate!—War!—Pain!—*This is thy harvest, Cain!

[*The guns sound. The drums rumble.*]

Announcer: Thus ends the story of Cain and Abel.

DIANA OF THE EPHESIANS

CHARACTERS:

DEMETRIUS, a silversmith

ALASIA, his wife

LOBELIUS, his friend

MARCUS, his friend

NICHOLAS, his slave

CROWD

SCENES: 1. THE HOME OF DEMETRIUS

2. THE SAME

3. THE THEATRE

4. THE HOME OF DEMETRIUS

5. OUTSIDE A CAVE BEYOND THE CITY WALLS

SCENE I

Announcer: In Ephesus, a city of Asia, stood the great temple of the goddess Diana. Thither came many to worship, and to lay their sacrifice before the golden statue of the goddess. Outside the marble steps of the temple were many booths; and not the least of these were the shops where the silversmiths sold small images of Diana. Business was good, and they prospered.

Now, it came to pass about this time that a new Faith began to find its way into Asia, and even into the city of the temple of the goddess Diana, a Faith that struck not only at the security of the temple, but also at the prosperity of those men who sold silver images of the goddess. It grew slowly, this Faith, it suffered persecution; but it grew; and at length the image makers of Ephesus saw in it a very real danger to their business.

Now, the leader of the silversmiths was a man named Demetrius, and one night he called the members of his Guild together; and when they were all comfortably seated in his luxurious home, when the wine had been passed around, and a few pleasantries had been exchanged, Demetrius called the meeting to order.

Demetrius: Ah, gentlemen, it's very good of you to come here—all of you; and I assure you, gentlemen, I shall not keep you any longer than is necessary.

Marcus: My dear Demetrius; you don't need to make any apologies for calling us together; and with this excellent wine you've given us, I for one am willing to stay all night! [Laughter.]

Demetrius: It's very nice of you to say so. Here, slave!

Nicholas: Yes, master?

Demetrius: More wine for the gentlemen. And be quick about it!

Nicholas: Yes, master. [Exit NICHOLAS.]

Demetrius: Now, gentlemen, I think you may have guessed what I'm going to say?

Lobelius: Indeed I have, Demetrius. It's this new religion that's poisoning our city—these Christians!

Demetrius: You are right, Lobelius. You've taken the words right out of my mouth. These Christians—exactly! And what are we going to do about it?

Marcus: But, gentlemen, what *can* be do about it?

Demetrius: My dear friend! We are business men; solid, substantial—and, I feel sure, honest business men; the backbone of this city.

Lobelius: Exactly; the very backbone of the city!

Demetrius: Members of an old and honourable craft, my friends, a craft that is identified with the religious

life of this city; image-makers to the temple! Why, gentlemen, if *we* do not take a stand against this new sect that would overthrow the Goddess Diana—great is her glory!—who will do it?

Lobelius: Demetrius is quite right, gentlemen. These Christians are undermining our institutions; why, they're spreading like a secret plague! You don't know who is a Christian and who isn't! Half the slaves have been tainted with it—get that point, gentlemen! The slaves, I say, joining a religion that declares there is no slavery! That's a pretty state of things! And furthermore, gentlemen, they're getting bolder—these Christians! They're sending fellows right here, to Ephesus, to hold public meetings.

Marcus: No! I can't believe it!

Demetrius: It's quite true! I have it on good report that one Paul, a Jew, of Tarsus—

Lobelius: Oh, I've heard of Paul! There's a dangerous fellow for you! What's he up to this time, Demetrius?

Demetrius: He's coming here to-morrow night to hold a meeting—

Lobelius: Here? In the city of the Goddess Diana? He won't dare!

Demetrius: He will dare. I tell you, these men are fanatics—afraid of nothing!

Lobelius: We'll turn him back at the gates, gentlemen—that's what we'll do!

Voice: Indeed, we will! Dangerous radicals! They ought to be hanged!

Demetrius: Just a moment, gentlemen; I commend you for your zeal. But I'm opposed to driving Paul away from here.

Lobelius: Opposed, Demetrius! You *want* him here?

Demetrius: Gentlemen, don't you see my point? I want the Christians to have their meeting. I want to break it up! I want to show them, once and for all, we won't stand for this sort of thing! And, above all, I hope we can work up a riot; and in the midst of it we'll lay hold of this Paul—and we'll finish him!

Lobelius: Splendid, splendid!

Demetrius: Just a moment, gentlemen! Here, boy! [*Enter NICHOLAS.*] Come in here with that wine! Why were you hanging round the door that way? Huh?

Nicholas: I—I didn't want to interrupt you, master.

Demetrius: Well, serve the wine!

Nicholas: Yes, master!

Demetrius: There! This knave has thrown my thoughts off their course; let me see now—ah—oh, yes; the meeting to-morrow night! [*Exit NICHOLAS.*]

Marcus: Where's it to be held?

Demetrius: In the Public Theatre. Now, see that you are all there.

Voice: We'll be there, Demetrius, never fear!

Demetrius: Lobelius, you're good at talking. You get up and heckle this Paul, and whoever speaks—make it hot for him, and when he tries to answer you, we'll hoot him down!

All: We will. Never fear! We'll raise the roof!

Demetrius: I have it! We'll begin to yell: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

Lobelius: That's a splendid idea! That appeals to patriotism!

Demetrius: We'll show these foreigners they can't come in here and tell us anything! Why, all the people will join us!

Lobelius: We'll hoot them out! We'll yell them

down! We'll show them! Gentlemen, great is Diana of the Ephesians! Now—

All: Great is Diana of the Ephesians!

Lobelius: Oh, louder! Louder! As though you meant it!

All: Great is Diana of the Ephesians!

Lobelius: Good! Good!

Demetrius: And keep it up, men! Work the people up! And when the time is ripe—lay hold of this Paul and his disciples; and don't be too gentle with them!

Voice: We'll kill them, that's what we'll do! Good-night, Demetrius; you can count on me! [*Exit.*]

Lobelius: And on me, good friend!

[*Exit LOBELIUS.*]

Demetrius: Good-night, Lobelius. Good-night, good friends. Good-night.

Others: Good-night.

[*Exit all except DEMETRIUS and MARCUS.*]

Demetrius: Well, Marcus, we're alone now, and I tell you it's gratifying to me to see our business men rise to this emergency—with determination. Determination, sir!

Marcus: They'd better, Demetrius!

Demetrius: Why do you say it in that tone, Marcus?

Marcus: You know as well as I do, my dear fellow!

Demetrius: I know that we're doing a great public service—

Marcus: Service?

Demetrius: For Religion!

Marcus: Religion? So?

Demetrius: And Public Morals!

Marcus: Now, really, old friend, you don't expect me to listen to such nonsense?

Demetrius: Nonsense, Marcus!

Marcus: Why, of course it's nonsense! It's all right to talk that way in public, or at a meeting of the Guild; but really, in private, why can't we be honest with each other—and say what we all know—instead of all this high-sounding talk about Service and Religion!

Demetrius: I—I don't even know what you're talking about!

Marcus: Of course you do! Even that slave standing there knows! My dear Demetrius, it's quite apparent, even to a stupid man—like the ordinary citizen—that what worries us is not Religion but Business!

Demetrius: What a sordid idea, Marcus!

Marcus: Not at all. We make statues of Diana. It's our living. These Christians come along and say: "There are no gods made with hands. There are no gods of silver and gold." Some people begin to believe them. Of course they stop buying our merchandise. It's very serious. It worries me as much as it does you. I'm as anxious to crush the Christians as you are—but, for the sake of honesty, why not look at the thing in the face?

Demetrius: Marcus, I am devoted to the Goddess Diana.

Marcus: Fiddlesticks!

Demetrius: Marcus!

Marcus: I say, Fiddlesticks! You're no more devoted than I am. We worship from force of habit. If we'd started worshipping a tree or a rock or an elephant—we'd be doing that now. Of course we would! Look at that image of the goddess standing there in the corner. You made it. Do you believe it is a god? Would you go to it in your hour of torment and ask for help? Would you give your life for that bit of metal? Would you? No! And neither would I. Your wife doesn't

worship it. It's the bane of your life that she doesn't go to the temple—because it may hurt your position—

Demetrius: But—

Marcus: Let me finish. She doesn't go, and I respect her for it; we've got to go—and stand up in the front row and be seen, because it's our business. But in private, my dear friend—let us at least be honest men.

Demetrius: Oh, you misunderstand me, Marcus—I—

Marcus: Demetrius, I shall see you to-morrow night. I shall be at the meeting, filled with a holy zeal, and I shall stand where all my customers can see me—and I shall yell, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Good-night, my dear fellow. [Curtain.]

SCENE II

Announcer: And so the mildly cynical Marcus went home, leaving Demetrius somewhat disturbed. It was not Marcus's ideas about Diana that bothered Demetrius; it was a matter much closer to home than that.

The good man stood for a moment, looking at the statue of Diana, that returned a cold and somewhat vacant stare; but since Demetrius had fashioned the features of the goddess himself, it was his own fault that she was not a little more human. But he was not thinking of Diana. His thoughts were on another lady—a distinctly human person, with nothing of the goddess about her—namely, his wife. Demetrius called his servant.

Demetrius: Nicholas! Boy! [Enter NICHOLAS.]

Nicholas: Yes, master?

Demetrius: Where's your mistress?

Nicholas: I don't know, master.

Demetrius: Find out—and tell her to come here. At once.

Nicholas: Yes, master.

Demetrius: Ah—Nicholas!

Nicholas: Yes, sir?

Demetrius: Ah—you know a good many of the slaves in this vicinity. Don't you?

Nicholas: Quite a number, sir.

Demetrius: Do you know any Christians?

Nicholas: Sir?

Demetrius: Do you know any Christians, I said.

Nicholas: N-no, sir.

Demetrius: Why do you hesitate like that?

Nicholas: I don't know any, sir. They don't tell that they are Christians. There's too much fear of persecution, sir.

Demetrius: Fear, eh? Well, they're going to fear more from now on. Go along, boy. Do what I told you.

Nicholas: Here comes my mistress now, sir.

Demetrius: Then get out—get out! Didn't you hear me?
[*Enter ALASIA, exit NICHOLAS.*]

Alasia: Good-evening, Demetrius.

Demetrius: I was going to send for you, Alasia.

Alasia: Here I am.

Demetrius: I have something to tell you.

Alasia: You look as though it might be something unpleasant.

Demetrius: It is. Very. You're being talked about.

Alasia: How ridiculous! [Laughs.]

Demetrius: I don't mean what you think I mean!

Alasia: Dear me, Demetrius; I thought you were going to be jealous. It would have been so exciting.

Demetrius: Don't be trivial! This is an important matter. You've got to go to the temple with me in the future.

Alasia: O Demetrius! You're so funny!

Demetrius: I'm not funny. I'm very upset—

Alasia: And just as red as a turkey cock!

Demetrius: Listen to me!

Alasia: Grrrrr! woof!

Demetrius: Stop it!

Alasia: Demetrius, you know I can't go to the temple and worship six hundred-weight of silver. It's too ridiculous. You may have to, but I don't—and I shall not.

Demetrius: You shall! And you're going to the meeting of the Christians to-morrow night—

Alasia: Christians!

Demetrius: Yes, Christians! Why do you jump like that when I say the word?

Alasia: I didn't jump, as you said. I simply wonder what you're talking about.

Demetrius: You're going there with me, and you're going to help the decent people of the city break up that meeting.

Alasia: Am I?

Demetrius: And you're going to be seen—and put an end to this talk that you're not devoted to Diana. That's all I've got to say.

Alasia: You've said quite enough for one evening; haven't you, dear?

Demetrius: Good-night! [Exit DEMETRIUS.]

Alasia: Good-night, dear.

[Pause. In a moment NICHOLAS enters.]

Nicholas—What is it? What is it?

Nicholas: Wait till I'm sure he can't hear us!

Alasia: Why, you're trembling!

Nicholas: O Alasia, my mistress—they know that Paul, our leader, is coming here!

Alasia: For all our secrecy, I feared they would.

Nicholas: Not only that! Your husband and his friends will be at the meeting, will start a riot—and seek to kill our leader. I stood here and heard all this as they planned it!

Alasia: We must get word to Paul and his disciples! He must not run the risk of coming here.

Nicholas: There is time to warn him.

Alasia: I will go out of the city to meet him and warn him myself—

Nicholas: You might be discovered. Let me!

Alasia: No. You are a slave—not a slave in the spirit, O my comrade in God—but a slave in the flesh; they would stop you at the gate, thinking you were seeking freedom. I shall go myself. [Curtain.]

SCENE III

Announcer: It is now evening of the next day—the place the great open amphitheatre at Ephesus. Crowds have gathered—good-natured, curious crowds of people; simple townsfolk who have come to hear and to see—more for amusement than for anything else. Marcus, the mildly cynical silversmith, is there, also, likewise Lobelius and his friends—all primed to do their part, all watching for the entrance of Paul of Tarsus. Demetrius is also there—but he is alone, and his friends chaff him.

Marcus: Well, Demetrius, you boasted this morning that your wife was to be here. Where is she, eh?

Demetrius: I don't know any more than you do

where she is! She went off this morning—I can't bother about her now—

Marcus: I knew she wouldn't come!

Lobelius (*pointing off stage*): Look, friends! There's a Jew from Macedonia, one Gaius, that pale thin fellow in rags, pushing his way to the front! He's one of them—but he's not *the* one we want!

Marcus: I wonder where Paul is.

Lobelius: He should be here. He landed this morning, I heard. I sent one of my servants out to spy on him and make report. [*Crowd noises, off-stage.*]

Marcus: The crowd's getting impatient. They've come to see a show, and the chief actor isn't here, ha!

Demetrius: Do you think it possible he was warned; and is keeping away?

Lobelius: No, no! Nobody heard us last night.

Demetrius: There was that slave of mine!

Lobelius: That's right! He *was* there.

Demetrius: But he's had no chance to warn anyone. He's been at work all day—and there he is, standing over there now. Oh, he's too stupid to do anything like that. [*A steady clapping of hands and stamping of feet, off-stage.*]

Marcus: Ha! The crowd is getting impatient, clapping and stamping. They'll be easy to work on!

Demetrius: You go up a bit in front, Lobelius. We mustn't all stand together. See! That Jew has taken his place on the stage—and he's holding up his hand.

Marcus: Yes, and there was some more people crowding to the platform. They're getting more courageous, these Christians! Showing themselves.

Demetrius: Yes, but only a few poor slaves. Look at them! A sorry crew!

Marcus: No, there are some people from the next town going forward—

Demetrius: Good! The more the better.

Marcus: But where is *Paul*? Look, that fellow is going to speak.

Speaker (off): Men of Ephesus, I am come here—

Lobelius (off, but not so far): Oh, you've come here, have you? Well, we don't need you. You can go home!

[*Laughter.*]

Voice (off): Let the fellow speak!

Marcus: Lobelius is over-anxious!

Speaker (off): My friend, you must fear what I have to say, since you will not let me speak. [*Laughter.*]

Marcus: He hit Lobelius off, there—eh?

Speaker (off): I have no dangerous doctrine, my friends. I am not come here to destroy your temple and overthrow your city. I come offering you a Truth, so simple that you may not see it—

Lobelius (off): Is it truth to preach against our Goddess?

Voices (off): Aye! Is *that* truth? A fine sort of truth!

Marcus: Our friends warm to their work, Demetrius.

Speaker (off): O my brothers—there is only one truth—

Lobelius (off): My *brothers*, you call us! We know you for what you are—a Jew of Macedonia! Deny that!

Speaker (off): I do not deny it. I am a Jew and a follower of Jesus Christ, and would that you followed Him, too!

Lobelius (off): You hear that, men of Ephesus? He confesses he's a Jew! And he's coming here to tell us what to believe!

Voices (off): Rascal! A Jew! Out with him!

[*After these few speeches there is an ominous muttering.*]

Marcus: Demetrius, that stroke went home! The people mutter—but the fellow yonder is unafraid—

Speaker (off): I do not ask you to stay, but this is a free province of Rome, and the right of speech is free to all men.

Lobelius (off): To a Jew who comes here to destroy our faith, eh?

Speaker (off): I see that you will cry me down—but, men of Ephesus, you cannot cry down the Truth! You can silence my voice, but you cannot silence the voice of Truth! You cannot—

Lobelius (off): Answer one question, Christian! Should men worship the Goddess Diana?

Speaker (off): I know you seek to trap me, but I will answer, or I were unworthy of my Master! There are no gods that are made with hands!

Lobelius (off): He denies Diana! Men, he denies Diana!

Voices (off): He denies Diana!

Marcus: Demetrius, the crowd is with us.

Lobelius (off): Come, men of honest mind! Come, patriots! Show this fellow where you stand! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!

Marcus and Demetrius: Great is Diana of the Ephesians!

Lobelius (off): Let all Christians hear you, men—Come!

Voices (very loud): Great is Diana of the Ephesians! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!

Lobelius (off): Drive them out! Drive them out of the city!

Voices: Out with them! Great is Diana of the Ephesians! Wow! Out with them! Duck them in the river! Out with them!

Marcus: Demetrius, the pack is at its work.

Demetrius: But Paul escaped us. He was warned, I know it! I'll question that slave of mine! I'll find out!

Marcus: Good-night, Demetrius. Well, Diana is justified—and business should pick up. On *that* score at least, great is Diana of the Silversmiths! Good-night. [*Curtain.*]

SCENE IV

Announcer: The plan succeeds only partially. To be sure, the meeting is broken up, and a few Christians get driven out of the city by the mob, but Paul—already warned, as you know, and prevented by his disciples from risking his life—has escaped Demetrius and his colleagues. And now Demetrius returns home, determined to cross-examine the slave who was present at the meeting of the previous night. His wife greets him at the threshold of the room. [*Enter DEMETRIUS.*]

Alasia: Well, Demetrius, what happened?

Demetrius: We broke up the meeting.

Alasia: You don't seem very happy about it.

Demetrius: No! We really failed in what we set out to do—get that Paul and do away with him!

Alasia: Good!

Demetrius: Good!

Alasia: Why should you kill this man? Why should you persecute people for their faith?

Demetrius: Don't ask such a silly question.

Alasia: Some day you may have to answer it.

Demetrius: Well, I'm not going to answer it now. Where were you all day? Huh?

Alasia: Out beyond the walls in the sunshine.

Demetrius: You left just to spite me. I know.

Alasia: Demetrius, do you love me?

Demetrius: You know I love you—when you don't try to go against everything I wish.

Alasia: Do you love me so much that—

Demetrius: That what?

Alasia: Try to understand! You must.

Demetrius: Well—Oh, wait a minute—there's that slave Nicholas. I've got to have a word with him. Here, boy—come here! [*Enter NICHOLAS.*]

Nicholas: Master?

Demetrius: You answer me truthfully now, mind you! Did you leave this house to-day?

Nicholas: I did not, sir.

Demetrius: You're telling me a lie!

Nicholas: No, sir, I'm not!

Demetrius: You are! You were here last night, and you heard that we were going to kill Paul of Tarsus—didn't you?

Nicholas: Yes, sir, I did.

Alasia: Demetrius, don't scream at the boy!

Demetrius: I'll wager you're a cursed Christian, fellow! Deny it—

Nicholas: I—

Demetrius: Deny it! Take your oath! Get down and swear it! Oh, you're standing up and defying me, are you?

Nicholas: How can I swear that which is not true?

Demetrius: You *are* a Christian! You took that news to Paul of Tarsus!

Nicholas: I did not.

Demetrius: Get down on your knees!

Alasia: What are you going to do!

Demetrius (taking down lash): Look at this lash; you'll see!

Alasia: Don't strike that boy!

Nicholas: Let him strike me—he'll not make me talk!

Demetrius: I won't eh? [Whips NICHOLAS.]

Nicholas: Oh!

Demetrius: Who took that news to Paul? Whom did you tell?

Alasia: Demetrius! Don't strike him again!

Demetrius: Tell me, slave!

[Whips NICHOLAS again.]

Nicholas: Oh!

Alasia: Demetrius! Don't you dare to—

Demetrius: I'll beat him to death, if I must! Tell me, fellow, or you'll feel this whip again!

Nicholas: I—will—say nothing.

Demetrius: Then by the gods—

Alasia (holding his arm): Hold that whip! You are striking the wrong one, Demetrius.

Demetrius: What?

Alasia: I took that message to Paul of Tarsus.

Demetrius: You! Alasia!

Alasia: I am a Christian. I haven't told you. I feared you—and I couldn't tell you. I've tried. Again and again. I loved you, Demetrius, in spite of all your pompous words, and shallow talk. I wanted to stay by you, and reach your heart—little by little. Well, you know it now.

Demetrius: Yes. Get out, boy.

Nicholas: Don't strike her, or—

Alasia: Go, Nicholas—he won't harm me. Go.

[Exit NICHOLAS.]

Well, Demetrius?

Demetrius: Alasia, you see that statue of Diana?

Alasia: I see that silver statue that you made.

Demetrius: Get down and worship it.

Alasia: I will not worship an idol.

Demetrius: You will worship that statue with your mouth—if not with your heart. Down on your knees, Alasia! [*Forces her to her knees.*]

Alasia: You have *forced* me to my knees.

Demetrius: Worship it! Renounce your God! Renounce your Christ!

Alasia: No.

Demetrius: If you love life—renounce your God—and worship here!

Alasia: I will worship *my* God.

Demetrius: Come—give lip service to the goddess! I ask for nothing more! But in the eyes of men you shall worship her!

Alasia: I cannot, even with my lips.

Demetrius: Feel this knife? Pray to her—pray to Diana!

Alasia (kneeling): Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name—

Demetrius: Cease!

Alasia: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

Demetrius: Alasia, I cannot kill you—you are right! But for my sake—if you love me—if you would not destroy me—at least in the eyes of men worship the goddess!

Aye, kneel there with your eyes closed—and your heart closed to my words! Leave me! Leave me! It is finished! Leave me! Leave me! And may I never see you again! [*Curtain.*]

SCENE V

Announcer: And so Demetrius drove his wife Alasia from his home. Weeks passed, weeks of persecution for the little groups of Christians. They were forced to meet in secret—conduct their worship in caves, or under the arched vault of the sky, in the wilderness, by night. And they were weeks of loneliness, too, for the man Demetrius in his empty house. Week after week he waited, waited for his wife Alasia to return to him, but she did not come. And though he prospered, though he sold many silver images of the goddess Diana, there was no happiness for him. He searched for Alasia, he hired men to seek her, but in vain.

Now, one night, more lonely than ever, Demetrius came into his house and found a message from the cynical Marcus—a note that bade him come at once to a place not distant from the city. Throwing his cloak about him, Demetrius went out into the darkness, hurried through the city street, passed through the gate, crossed a wild moor, until at length he saw the spot of rendezvous—a gnarled oak close by a low hill. In the dim light he saw the bulky figure of a man and heard a voice calling—

Marcus: Demetrius?

Demetrius: I have come. Why have you sent for me, Marcus? Have you news of her?

Marcus: I have.

Demetrius: And know where she is?

Marcus: I do.

Demetrius: I must see her. Oh, I've fought against it, Marcus; I drove her from my house; I swore I would never see her again; but it's too lonely. I—I want to see her—I want her to come back to me.

Marcus: On your terms, or hers?

Demetrius: Well—I cannot tell you that.

Marcus: I can tell you she'll never go back on your terms, Demetrius—if it means a pretense of worship to your silver goddess. Never!

Demetrius: Where is she, Marcus! Let me see her!

Marcus: Demetrius, before I tell you, I want to ask you one thing.

Demetrius: Well?

Marcus: This has gone hard with you—hard. You know that. You've aged. There are lines in your face—lines of sorrow, torment.

Demetrius: Torment enough for one man.

Marcus: Yes. And I've seen her, my friend—not an hour ago; and her face is serene—at peace; and it made me wonder whether she didn't have something to turn to, in her crisis, more real than Diana of the Ephesians.

Demetrius: More real?

Marcus: I mean, something that cannot be destroyed. Something in her heart. Imperishable, eternal, deeper than love; greater than self—more triumphant than death.

Demetrius: I do not believe she is happy. I do not believe it.

Marcus: It isn't just happiness, it's deeper than that; I know she loves you, I know she wants you—can she really be happy in the sense most of us mean? No! It's not happiness she's found; it's something—by the gods, I don't know what it is! Unless—

Demetrius: Unless what?

Marcus: Listen! [*A distant hymn is heard, intoned.*]

Demetrius: What is that singing?

Marcus: The voice of your wife and of those who worship here—in secret. [*The hymn continues to its end.*]

Demetrius: It came from the hillside—

Marcus: There is a cavern there. The Christians worship their God in greatness of solitude, in the temple of the heart of the hills.

Demetrius: Let us draw closer. I hear words. Listen.

Marcus: Come closer—

Demetrius (whisper): Look—in the candle's light—a man reads from a scroll—

Marcus: Shhhh! They will hear us. I can almost hear them breathe.

Demetrius: It is my slave, Nicholas, who reads. An epistle.

Nicholas (a bit distant): For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ in behalf of you Gentiles. . . . Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice. . . . Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. . . . Take up the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. . . . Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth. And peace be unto the brethren, and love with faith, from God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Voices (subdued): Amen. Amen.

Marcus: Demetrius, shall I call her?

Demetrius: Marcus, I will go to her.

Marcus: Wait—

Voices: Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; deliver us from evil.

Demetrius: Deliver us from evil— We have found a God—greater than Diana of the Ephesians.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

CHARACTERS: SAMSON

DELILAH

ZOROBAB, her mother

NOBAN, patriarch of the Philistines

BERSHA, captain in the army of the
Philistines

CROWD

SCENES: 1. A COUNCIL CHAMBER OF THE PHILISTINES

2. THE CHAMBER OF DELILAH

3. THE CHAMBER OF DELILAH, SOME HOURS
LATER4. THE TEMPLE OF THE PHILISTINES AT GAZA,
SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

SCENE I

Announcer: "And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and she bare not. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and barest not; but thou shalt conceive and bear a son; and no razor shall come unto his head, for he shall be a Nazirite unto God. . . . And he shall begin to save Israel out of the hands of the Philistines. . . . And the woman bare a son, and called his name *Samson*; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. . . . [And it came to pass] that Samson rose against the Philistines, and smote

them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; and they could not prevail against him."

The first scene is laid in the council chamber of the Philistines in a tower on the walls of Gaza. Here Noban, a patriarch of his people, sits alone, waiting for Bersha, a young Philistine warrior, who has been sent out to spy on Samson. Memories of the victories of Samson and of the defeats of his own people, rise to trouble the patriarch.

Noban:

Samson—Samson! Scourge of the Philistines!
Before thy anger we are powerless!
Before thy strength we are like leaves that fly
Before the whirlwind! Death and devastation
Follow in thy track. O ruthless enemy,
How shall we conquer thee? How shall we fight
Against thee? And of what avail our strength
When thou art mightier than a thousand men?
No, Samson—thou laughest all our host to scorn!
And day by day the torrent of thy wrath
Sweeps o'er our people, like a raging flood—
And we, like boys with sticks and straws and stones
Would dam the fearful torrent of thy course!

[*A knock.*]

Noban (off): Who comes?

Birsha: It is I, my father, Birsha. Let me in.

[*Enter BIRSHA.*]

Noban:

What news! What news of Samson? Speak, my son!

Birsha:

Bad news I bring.

Noban: Again!

Birsha: I am but come
From Hebron. Samson in his rage hath killed
Fourscore of men, and laid a village bare.
The dead are heaped in the streets! 'Tis said
He came upon them in the night, alone,
And like a thunderbolt did strike, and strike;
And where he struck—was death!

Noban:
Again! Again! Thou sayest he came alone?

Birsha:
Alone. Would God I had myself been there!
For we must strike or perish. Let us call
Our men at arms! And in one mighty stroke
Let us risk all. For when so *many* strike
He cannot but be slain!

Noban: Hast thou forgotten
Ramath-lehi, and how we gathered there
More than a thousand men! And how he turned
And smote us? Hast thou now forgotten
The heaps of dead, thy brother's body there
Among the rest? And Samson standing by
Laughing our host to scorn? The sun set red
That fearful night, and every fireside
In all Philistia counted missing sons.
No, no, my son! 'Tis cunning now we need—

Birsha:
Thou dost not know the rest!

Noban: Well, speak, my son—

Birsha:
At night 'tis said he comes within our walls!

Noban:
Within *these* walls?

Birsha: Aye, when the night hath come
They say he ventures here alone, and seeks

A maiden of our people.

Noban:

Quick! Her name!

Birsha: Delilah.

Noban: Ah!

Birsha: Thou knowest—

Noban:

Well indeed

I know her mother; and the maid is fair

And young and of a tender mind withal.

Wait, wait! Boy, let me think.

A maid! 'Tis well. Thou bringest news indeed!

Birsha:

Hast thou a plan?

Noban: Wait! Wait! Tell me again—

Zorobah's daughter—nightly—all alone—

What doth the mother say?

Birsha:

I hear it told

She hates the Israelite, and lives in fear

That harm may yet befall her and her kin

Because her daughter loves him.

Noban:

The hour he comes?

Birsha: I know it not.

Noban:

I shall myself find out.

Get thee from hence! Procure me bags of silver!

I shall seek out Zorabah, in her ear

To pour my plan! For we shall yet prevail!

If Samson loves, his doom is signed and sealed!

Samson, lion of Israel, I shall snare thee!

The maid is young, and by a threat of death

And promise of reward, I'll work upon her,

And win her to my scheme. I hear it told

There is a secret to this Samson's power—

Some charm, some hidden amulet he wears;
We shall find out. And though the arms of war
Prevail not, then perchance the arms—
The soft arms of a woman—may prevail,
And dig a trap wherein this lion may
Be snared. Ah, Samson! All thy mighty strength
Indeed shall be as naught 'gainst well-devised
cunning!

SCENE II

Announcer: "And it came to pass that Samson loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him . . . and we will give thee every one of us eleven hundred pieces of silver."

It is now several hours after the first scene. Twilight has come, the languid twilight of the East. In a room luxurious with soft tapestries, Delilah awaits her lover.

[*Curtain. DELILAH alone on divan.*]

Delilah:

Let there be music now. (*She claps her hands.*)

For I would hear

The very song he listened to last night

That, listening, I may dream that he is here!

[*The music starts.*]

Leave me not desolate. When thou art gone

It is a void that never can be filled

Until thou comest again! I do not know

Why I should love thee. For at times I fear

Thy strength; and in those gentle eyes of thine

I see a sleeping anger.

[Voices join the harp. The music continues for some time. Suddenly comes a sharp voice, breaking into the music, which continues a moment longer.]

Zorobah:

Delilah! *[Enter ZOROBAB.]* Wherefore shouldst thou play to-night? *[She claps her hands.]*

Stop now thy music! *(The music stops.)* I have words for thee

That thou must listen to.

Delilah:

I listen, mother.

Zorobah:

Thou hast thy jewels on! I know! Speak not! Samson comes here to-night.

Delilah: He comes. Indeed I *hope* he comes.

Zorobah: I do beseech thee now

Have done with him! He is thine enemy

No friend, but foe; and slayer of thy kin!

Delilah:

Then, mother, I must love mine enemy.

Zorobah:

And I forbid thee now! Forbid thee, girl!

Delilah:

Some one hath filled thy mind with evil thoughts,
And sent thee here to poison me against him!

Zorobah:

Will't thou go thus against my will?

Delilah: I must.

Zorobah:

It will be death for thee and death for me!

Delilah:

No, no!

Zorobah: I speak with a prophetic voice.

Delilah:

Thou dost not know him, to speak thus of him.

Zorobah:

He is a treacherous, faithless Israelite!
And though he maketh love with tender words,
His heart is cruel even as he speaks,
And every kiss a faithless mockery.

Delilah:

No more, mother! Thou filleth me with fear.

Zorobah:

Listen, my daughter! Canst thou love the slayer
Of thine own brother? Canst thou give tenderness
To such a one—who cometh here to thee
Fresh from the murder of a hundred men?

Delilah:

These things are lies, to set my heart against him!

Zorobah:

I speak the truth!

Delilah: Oh, leave me to myself!

For doubts and fears lie heavy on my heart,
And all my joy is in eclipse again,
As when the summer moon against the sky
Obscuréd is by some dark drifting cloud.

Zorobah:

Listen, Delilah! I had a dream last night;
I saw a flock feeding in pastures green,
A shepherd girl guarding them with her staff.
Then from the woods there came a giant dog.
The shepherd girl did call him to her side,
For he showed friendliness. Then, as I looked,
I saw the great dog turn and rend the flock.
The shepherd girl cried out—it was too late!—
The monster dragged her to the ground, and tore
Her heart, and left her dead among her sheep.

Delilah:

What means this dream?

Zorobah: Now hear the prophecy!

I told my dream to one who can divine,
And read the stars and find out hidden things.

Thou art the shepherd girl; Samson, the dog;

The sheep, thy people; and the death, thine own!

Delilah:

Oh, awful dream! Oh, prophecy of death!

Oh, horrid thought that turns my heart to stone!

What shall I do? My doom is on my head!

[*There is a heavy knock on the door.*]

He comes!

Zorobah: No, 'tis a man would speak with thee.

Noban, a patriarch of thine own people. Enter.

[*Enter NOBAN and PHILISTINES.*]

Delilah:

What wouldst thou, Noban?

Noban:

Delilah! Woman of Sorek, hear my words:

Thou seest I am bent and white with age;

Three of my sons have died within the year.

But sorrow hath not turned to me alone.

Full many of thy people are bereft.

There is a scourge upon us; night and day

We have no peace.

Delilah: Why dost thou come to me?

Noban:

I do beseech thee now to save thy people!

Do but my bidding, and thy name shall be

Most blessed in our land, and thy reward

Most kingly! Look, Delilah, look upon

These heavy bags of silver—all for thee!

The riches of an emperor—all for thee!

[*Holds out silver.*]

Delilah:

What can I do that thou wouldst give to me
Such treasure? How can such a one as I
Do aught to save my people? I know not
Thy words.

Noban: Listen and thou wilt know, Delilah!
Thou art beloved of Samson—this I know.
He cometh here by night, unarmed, alone.
His strength, they say, doth come from hidden
charms.

Find *thou* the secret of his mighty power,
And all this treasure shall be thine indeed!
But *fail* my plan, and I shall find the means
To punish thee most sorely. Wouldst thou be
Thy people's enemy? or wouldst thou *save*?
Wouldst thou choose this—and life? (*Clinks*
money) or this? (*Draws sword.*)

And death.

Delilah: Put up thy sword!

Noban: Thine answer!

Delilah (sobbing):

I—do—not—know—

Noban: Thine answer—now!

Zorobah: Delilah!

Delilah:

Leave me in peace—

Noban: Thine answer, ere I go!

Zorobah:

Say yes, Delilah! Yes—thou wilt betray him!

Noban:

If not, thy family shall be punished, too.

[*There is an assenting murmur of voices.*]

My men are at the door, a hundred strong,

And at my word are ready to rush in
And drag thee to the market-place, the fire!

Delilah:

Oh! Oh!

Noban:

But choose the better way, and find his secret;
We shall be hid in yonder room, and when
The word is given rush and lay upon him.

Zorobah:

She doth say *yes!* Come, daughter, give thy word!

Noban:

Give her the silver.

Zorobah:

Here it is, my daughter. [*Gives DELILAH silver.*]

Noban:

The pact is made. Come, men, we will withdraw.
[*Exit NOBAN and PHILISTINES.*]

Zorobah:

When Samson comes, be merry! Show no sign
Of fear! And draw his secret from his heart.
The die is cast. There is no turning back. Fare-
well. [*Exit ZOROBAH. A pause.*]

Delilah:

The die is cast. There is no turning back.
It is indeed the dream that shaketh me.
Not for this silver, not for all the gold,
Nor jewels rich would I betray thee, Samson.
No, no! It is the fear that in thy love
There lieth death for me, and all my own.
O cruel trap, from whence is no escape!
O fatal night, wherein my heart is broken!
Come not again, my love, come not again!
Come not to-night. It is a fatal night,
And my soft arms beguile thee to thy death.

Oh, all the fears that compass me about
Are like the shadows on a windy night.
Come not again, my love, come not again!
For *shouldst* thou come, there is no other way
For me to choose. Oh, come not to-night!

SCENE III

Announcer: "And Delilah said unto Samson . . .
How canst thou say, I love thee, when thine heart is not
with me? . . . Thou hast mocked me, and hath not
told me wherein thy great strength lieth! And it came
to pass when she pressed him . . . with her words, and
urged him, that his soul was vexed unto death."

Several hours later. Samson has come, and is alone
with Delilah.

Samson:

Why dost thou turn thy face from me, Delilah?
There is about thee something sad to-night.
Tell me thy fears. I will dispel them all!
Let us be gay, and speed the hours with music!

Delilah:

How strong thy hands! Whence cometh all thy
strength?

Samson:

Speak not of my strength; speak not of wars
And battles! In thy hands, my beautiful,
Thy Samson is not strong. The light within
Thine eyes more shaketh me than all the hosts
And mighty men of war. I am but weak.
Speak not of strength to-night; but let thy voice
Speak only of thy love, and I will listen.
Why dost thou cast thy glance upon the ground,
As though there were some hidden fear within thee?

Delilah:

No, Samson—I am gay! Let music sound!

[Music of the harp from behind thick curtains.]

Samson:

Tell me thy love, tell me thy love again—

That, listening, I may store it in my heart

Against the time when thou art far away.

Art glad I came to-night? Tell me, Delilah.

Delilah:

I—am glad—

Samson:

Thou sayest it so sadly!

As though it were a fearful thing, my love.

Delilah:

Tell me one thing; whence cometh all thy strength?

Samson:

Wherefore doth thou need strength, my beautiful?

Delilah:

Tell me—

Samson: To-morrow.

Delilah:

Nay! Tell me to-night.

Tell me, and I shall give thee aught tho't wish.

Samson:

Why wouldst thou know this secret of my strength?

Delilah:

Then it *is* a secret! Oh, have not

A secret from thy love! Tell me to-night!

Samson:

No—ask me not.

Delilah:

How canst thou say, “I love thee”!

And tellst me not wherein thy great strength lieth!

Samson:

Press me not, beloved.

Delilah:

Thou dost not love me, Samson!

Seeing I have but asked this little thing,
And thou wilt tell me not.

Samson: Nay, first sing for me,
The very song thou gavest me last night,
And I shall tell thee. Thou hast vexed my soul
With too much questioning. Sing for me now.

Delilah:
Thy promise, Samson!
Tell me all within thy heart,
That I may know thy love is true indeed.

Samson:
Look then upon my head; thou seest the locks
Unshorn upon it? So have I always been.
Never has razor come upon my head.
Within these locks doth lie my secret power.
If I be shorn, then all my strength goes from me,
And I become as any other man.
And now thou hast my secret. Guard it well;
And by thy love reveal it nevermore.
Sing for me now; I fain would sleep awhile,
And on these silken cushions billowed soft
Forget the turmoils and the threats of war,
And to the benediction of thy love
Yield all my heart, Delilah. Sing for me.

Delilah:
Music! My lyre! (*Servant brings lyre, and
exits.*) Sleep, oh lion of Israel;
Sleep, my mighty one. I sing for thee.
[*DELILAH plays on her lyre.*]

He sleeps! It is the moment now!
Quick! Before he wakes again!
It is too late. There is no turning back.
He came to me for love: I bring him death.
And now the shears! And rope, to bind him fast

Before he wakes to find himself a captive.

[She takes shears and begins to cut his locks.]

SCENE IV

Announcer: "And he awoke out of his sleep . . . and he wist not that the Lord had departed from him. And the Philistines laid hold of him, and put out his eyes; and they brought him down and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house. Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again. . . . And the Lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon, their god, and to rejoice; for they said, Our God hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hands. . . . And it came to pass when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport."

The next and last scene is the temple of the Philistines at Gaza. Great crowds of people surge in to see their conquered enemy. Even the roof is crowded with curious throngs, as a little boy leads out the blind Samson from his prison. They mock him, for, as they think, he is now powerless. He hears the mocking shouts; he sets his lips firmly. The taunts, the jeers, fall on his ears, but he maintains an unshaken dignity. And now he is standing in the very center of the temple and around him the taunting, jeering mob. They dance, a barbaric dance of victory.

[Curtain. Stage full of jeering PHILISTINES. A little boy leads out the blind SAMSON. He stands and they mock him. Note: The only scenery required is a pillar against which SAMSON leans. At the end of the play, when SAMSON destroys the temple, the lights should

go out and the crash and screams should come in the darkness.]

Voice:

Show us thy strength, Samson! [Jeers.]

Samson (quietly):

Oh, do not forsake me, O my God!

Voice:

He calls upon his God! Ha, ha, ha! [Jeers.]

Can thy God give thee back thine eyes again?

Can thy God give back thy strength anew? [Jeers.]

Samson:

I hear thee, Philistines. I hear thy jeers.

Voice:

And feel again our lash upon thy back!

[They flog SAMSON.]

Voices:

Aye, flog him! Once more!

He is too blind and broken to make sport.

[There is shouting and the mob goes out, jeering.]

Samson:

Boy, thou hast eyes. Tell me what happens here?

Boy:

They dance around the statue of their god.

Samson:

Is there one here whose name they call Delilah?

Boy:

I see her not.

Samson:

'Tis well. Take thou my hand.

Fear not. I shall not harm thee. Take my hand.

And suffer me to lean against the pillars

Whereon the temple resteth. I am tired.

Boy:

Come, Samson; I will lead thee then.

Samson:

Boy, are many in this temple now?

Boy:

More than five thousand men. 'Tis black with them.

Samson:

Place thou my hands upon the pillar, boy.

[Boy does so.]

Boy:

Thy hands are on it, Samson. Feel it, here.

Samson:

Lord God, hear thou my prayer! Give me my
strength— *[The music of the dance and
revelry comes louder.]*

Let me strike one last blow for thee, O Lord!

Only this once, only this once, O God!

That I may be avenged of my two eyes!

Boy:

They call thee to make sport. *[Shouts and jeers.]*

Samson: I hear them, boy.

[The music and laughter continues.]

Voice (off-stage):

See how the mighty Samson leans to rest

Against the pillars! Come! Make sport for us!

Samson:

I hear thy mockery. I shall remember.

Voice (off-stage):

Ha, ha! Ha, ha!

Samson:

Thou couldst not conquer me in battle fair,
But used my love to snare me—I shall bring
A great revenge upon thee! And in death
Slay more than in my life.

Voices (off-stage):

How canst thou harm us now?

Thou art blind; what need we fear thee! (*Etc.*)

Samson:

Boy, art thou near at hand?

Boy: Here, Samson.

Samson:

Fly thee from this temple now—

And say in after years, when thou art old,

How one who slew his thousands showed to thee

His mercy for thy kindness. Good boy, farewell.

[*Exit Boy.*]

O Thou Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee,

And strengthen me, I pray Thee. Give again

The fearful power of Thy righteous anger

So to avenge me on my enemies.

O God! My strength—it comes! I feel the pillar

Give beneath my hand. *Now, O Philistines!*

[*SAMSON leans against pillar. The lights go out.*

There is a tremendous crash. Screams. A panic of men and women. Groans. Then silence.]

Announcer: And so ends the story of Samson and Delilah.

SAUL OF TARSUS

CHARACTERS: SAUL	ANANIAS
OLD MAN	PRIEST
JUDAS	AGRIPPA
	FESTUS

- SCENES: 1. STREET IN JERUSALEM
 2. SAME. A FEW MINUTES LATER
 3. THE HOME OF ANANIAS IN DAMASCUS. TWO
 DAYS LATER
 4. THE HOME OF JUDAS IN DAMASCUS IN THE
 STREET CALLED STRAIGHT
 5. JERUSALEM. SOME YEARS LATER
 6. THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE—CÆSAREA. TWO
 YEARS LATER
 7. PAUL'S CELL IN ROME. SOME YEARS LATER

SCENE I

Announcer: At the beginning of the story of Saul of Tarsus it is well to refresh our memories as to the conditions that surrounded the establishment of the Christian Church. Jesus had charged His followers to "make disciples of all the nations," and following this injunction, His apostles preached the word of Christ throughout the length of Israel, carrying it even into neighboring countries. The number of Christian converts increased steadily; and as they increased they found, from the members of the orthodox Jewish Church, a steadily growing opposition, which from time to time broke into open persecution.

Leading this persecution in Jerusalem was Saul, a citizen of the city of Tarsus—a man of position and of education who believed these Christians to be a menace both to the orthodox Church and to the state. Our first scene finds Saul in the streets of Jerusalem, inciting a mob to violence.

[SAUL on steps; the crowd around him.]

Mob (a sentence to each man): 'Tis Saul. We'll stay and hear him. Speak, Saul. What news hast thou? Ascend the steps, that we may see! Say on. (*etc.*).

Saul: Good friends, stay! I am, as you well know, a man of Tarsus and a citizen of Rome, yet there is not among you one who holds more dear than I this Temple of Jerusalem; not one who has practiced with more zeal the faith of his fathers. Ye know this well; I need not tell it to you, men of Jerusalem.

Mob: 'Tis true. Aye, right.

Saul: Is there among you one who can gainsay these words? One who would defile that holy place? One who'd dare stand forth and in the sight of all the priests dispute the Holy Scriptures, or defy our Sabbath laws? If there be such a one, I bid him speak!

Mob: There's none, O Saul. Not one would dare.

Saul: I know right well not one of you would dare. And yet you stand like sheep, afraid to open your mouths, while heretics work ceaselessly to overthrow our holy Church—while these Christians strive to undermine our faith, the faith of our fathers, the faith of Abraham.

Mob: 'Tis true, they work us harm. They do wax strong. Their numbers grow.

Saul: Can you remain indifferent until the Christians

have destroyed both Church and state? Men of Jerusalem, rise! Be bold. Be resolute. Be merciless! Seek out thy Church's enemies. Drive them from the city gates. Crush them without pity. If they confess Christ, destroy their goods. Aye, put torches unto their dwellings. Drive them out with stones. Begone! Away! And show no mercy. [*The mob goes out, crying against the Christians.*]

SCENE II

Announcer: But although a great number of the Jews were moved to acts of persecution by Saul's words, not all the members of the orthodox Church in Jerusalem approved of his activities against the Christians. In the next scene, which takes place a few moments later, we hear an old man—a faithful servant of the Temple—who, on hearing Saul's inflammatory speech, approaches him to remonstrate against his violence.

[*SAUL on stage. Enter OLD MAN.*]

Old Man: Saul of Tarsus, I greatly wonder that thou, a man of education, dost so inflame our people to acts of violence against the Christians.

Saul: They must be destroyed—else they will destroy us!

Old Man: O Saul, what folly! Folly! I know that thou art filled with zeal to serve thy God. But God is not truly served by persecution.

Saul: My father, these Christians plot against us. They seek to destroy our ancient faith. Is this not cause to stamp them out?

Old Man: Ah, Saul, thou art impetuous—filled with zeal, but not with the wisdom that comes with age. I—I have seen a dozen such bands spring up—and wither

in a season; I counsel thee, abandon persecution, and this sect will also languish and die.

Saul: Nay, my father! These Christians are not like other men. They multiply and spread—and we must check them ere they grow too strong!

Old Man: Thy fears are groundless, Saul. They are simple folk—fishermen and tillers of the soil. Such people do not overthrow the state, nor shake the foundation of the Temple of our God!

Saul: True, my father; they are but simple folk; perhaps as yet the danger is not great; but if a *Leader* comes, a man resourceful and resolute—what then?

Old Man: A leader? Tush, tush! What leader could such simple folk draw to them? Saul, it is thy imagination which creates these fears.

Saul: Nay, father, let me ask thee this: What man of us can say with certainty that no such leader will come? My course is clear: I shall scatter them and break them while they are still weak and powerless.

Old Man: My son, I would dissuade you from this folly.

Saul: Folly, my father?

Old Man: Aye. For every deed of persecution gives them strength! What have thy persecutions done? Have they broken their faith? Nay—they have strengthened it! Have they filled them with terror? Nay. Saul, these men meet death as a triumph and a glory!

Saul: 'Tis true—they die with courage.

Old Man: Thou dost place a martyr's crown upon them—and fill them with a martyr's zeal! O Saul, Saul! Thou yet shalt be the means to spread their faith.

Saul: I? I spread their faith?

Old Man: Saul, I prophesy thy persecutions will spread their faith to the far corners of the earth!

SCENE III

Announcer: "But Saul, yet breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and asked of him letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any Christians that were on the way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

The next scene is laid in a house in Damascus; here Ananias, a leader of the Christians of Damascus, sits alone in his room and meditates on the persecution of the Church.

Ananias: Father in Heaven, give us strength to endure and to suffer, even as thy beloved Son Jesus Christ. Grant us courage to meet the evils of the day and the perils of the night. Let Thy Church be a rock, against which the waves of persecution shall be split asunder. (*Knocking.*) Who comes at this hour to my door? Speak?

Thomas: Open the door, father—

Ananias: It is the voice of my son Thomas. Enter. (*Enter THOMAS.*) What news brings you here at this hour of the night?

Thomas: Bad news, my father.

Ananias: Tell me—

Thomas: The Apostle Stephen has been stoned to death in Jerusalem.

Ananias: Stephen? This is indeed bad news.

Thomas: Yes, my father—for now where shall our Church find another man with his eloquence and his power to sway the minds of men?

Ananias: God will send us such a one, my son.

Thomas: But Stephen's death is not all the evil news I bring, my father.

Ananias: Speak!

Thomas: I have had word that Saul of Tarsus, the scourge of our Church, is even now approaching Damascus with a band of armed men to lay waste our homes, and to cast us into prison.

Ananias: This is evil news.

Thomas: We must seek safety in flight.

Ananias: No. We cannot go. We must not let our enemies scatter us. That is the purpose of their persecution. We must resist it.

Thomas: Then we shall be slain.

Ananias: Even so dealt they with the Lord our Saviour; shall we not follow in His footsteps? Let us endure all things with patience and with courage; and if it is the wisdom of God to afflict us with the persecution of Saul, let us stand firm! Carry this message to our Christian Brotherhood: Let there be no fear; our lives are in the hands of God.

SCENE IV

Announcer: You will recall that on the way to Damascus there came to Saul a spiritual crisis that was to alter the course of his life, and profoundly affect the form and spirit of the Christian Church.

The next scene of our story of Saul of Tarsus is laid three days later in the home of Judas in the street called Straight in Damascus, to which home Saul has come upon his arrival in the city. Judas, returning home from a journey, hears from servants that Saul has arrived, but that he has closed himself in a room and will touch neither food nor drink, nor will he see any of the

priests of the temple. Judas, alarmed, goes at once to Saul's room and knocks upon the door.

[SAUL *alone, in prayer.*]

Judas (without): Saul! (*Knocking.*) Saul of Tarsus! It is Judas, your host.

Saul (quietly): Good Judas, leave me unto myself.

Judas: Nay, Saul! Why do you keep thus to yourself, and refuse to see the priests of the Temple? Open the door, that I may see you.

Saul: It is open. Enter. [Enter JUDAS.]

Judas: How now, Saul! Why do you sit thus and stare past me, as though I were not here?

Saul: Judas, is it yet day?

Judas: Day! Why, the sun shines on your face, man!

Saul: I see it not.

Judas: Look upon me, Saul! Can you not see me?

Saul: I hear your voice, but I am in darkness.

Judas: You—you are—blind, Saul!

Saul: Even so.

Judas: Saul, when—when came this calamity upon you?

Saul: On the way from Jerusalem.

Judas: And how, Saul? How!

Saul: Nay, Judas, you would not understand.

Judas: But blindness comes not without *reason*, Saul! Why have you remained thus alone, calling no man to your side?

Saul: Judas, my friend, forgive me if I am silent, but there be things I cannot divulge.

Judas: Saul! You are mad!

Saul: Nay, my madness has left me, Judas—the madness of hate and the fury of persecution; I am filled

with a great wonder, and a great light that is brighter than the light of the sun.

Judas: What vain talk is this, Saul, for a man whose eyes are sealed with darkness!

Saul: Judas, do you give faith to miracles? If so, look then upon a man who is blind, and yet who now sees all things that had been hidden from him. Look upon a man who has been deprived of sight, and yet whose heart is full of light.

Judas: Saul, you are mad indeed!

Saul: Good Judas, it is not in my power to make you understand that which has come to pass —

Boy (outside): Judas, my master, are you within?

Judas: Well, boy, what is your news? [*Enter Boy.*]

Boy: There is below one Ananias, who would speak to Saul of Tarsus.

Judas: I know him not. Saul, will you see this man?

Saul: I will.

Judas: Boy, bring him hither. I shall remain.

[*Exit Boy.*]

Saul: I beseech you, Judas, let me see this man alone. Nay, I command it, or, blind though I am, I shall walk into the city streets to speak to him—

Judas: O Saul, your mind is clouded! I will not cross you, lest you do some desperate thing. Farewell.

[*Exit JUDAS. A pause; knocking.*]

Saul: Enter—

[*Enter ANANIAS.*]

Ananias: Saul of Tarsus, you see me not; but I am Ananias, and a Christian.

Saul: How found you my dwelling?

Ananias: Saul of Tarsus, this day as I prayed to God to strengthen all the Church of Christ against your persecutions, there came to me a vision; and a voice saying: "Arise, Ananias, and go to the street which is called

Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus: for behold he prayeth—

Saul: I do. I do.

Ananias: When I received this command I did protest again my vision, saying: "I have heard from many of this man Saul: and how much evil he did to the saints in Jerusalem—

Saul: I deny it not, servant of Christ.

Ananias: Saul of Tarsus, from now on you, too, shall be the servant of Christ, and His chosen vessel to bear His name before the kings and the Gentiles; many things must you suffer for His name's sake; but you shall spread His name to the far corners of the earth—

Saul: *I! Saul?* Spread His name—to the far corners of the earth—

Ananias: Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, who appeared unto you on the way which you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Saul of Tarsus, with this water I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; and to the service of Christ do I dedicate the power and greatness of mind, the eloquence of thy tongue, and the courage and loyalty of thy heart. Saul of Tarsus—from henceforth thou shalt be Saul of Tarsus no longer—but shalt be known to all men as Paul, the Apostle of Christ.

Saul: The scales have dropped from mine eyes! I see! I see! [Curtain.]

SCENE V

Announcer: Paul, baptized into the Christian faith, journeys to many distant places—spreading the words of Christ. His work bears fruit, and Christianity soon counts hundreds of converts.

Years pass, and Paul returns to Jerusalem. Here the same mob that he once inflamed against the Christians turns against him under the leadership of a Pharisee.

[PAUL *addressing mob.*]

Mob: Away with him! Kill him! Kill!

Priest: There stands Saul, who once led us against the Christians, and who now comes to Jerusalem to spread their doctrines! This villain changes even his name; but we are not fooled! We know thee, Saul of Tarsus—thou traitor!

Mob: We know thee, Saul!

Saul: Men of Jerusalem, it is true I have turned about. Would that you might turn with me!

[*Laughter.*]

Priest: This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people and the law! Shall we stand idly by while this man seeks to overthrow our holy Church?

Mob: No! No! Never!

Saul: I preach only the word of God—shall that corrupt ye, men of Jerusalem? [Mob noise.]

Priest: Was it not here on this very place that he inflamed us to murder? Why should we not cast him out and stone him likewise?

Mob: Yes! Answer that! Stone him!

Saul: Men of Jerusalem, I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, and hence a citizen of Rome; but I was raised in this city of Jerusalem. And thus I know you, men of this city, for I was once one of you. It is true what you say—that I once persecuted Christians unto death, binding and casting into prison both men and women—

Priest: And we shall do the same to you!

[*General noise.*]

Saul: Men of Jerusalem, had I feared death, should I have returned to speak to you concerning Christ?

[*Laughter from mob.*]

Priest: Away with him! It is not fit that he should live! Away with him! Make haste, before our tumult brings the Roman soldiers forth!

Voice: Let us take him hence, before the Romans seize him—

Mob: Yes! Away with him! They come! They come! [*Etc.*] [*Enter CAPTAIN and soldiers.*]

Captain: In the name of Cæsar! Hold! What is this, men of Jerusalem? What has this man done, that you lay hold of him?

Priest: His name is Saul, and he preaches against our law and seeks to overthrow our ancient Church!

Captain: Saul, is this true?

Saul: Nay, Centurion, I seek to establish the Church upon a firm foundation.

Captain: Then, Jews, why should this man be released to you?

Mob: He is our prisoner! Give him to us! [*Etc.*]

Saul: Captain, it is not lawful for you to give me up, for I was born in Tarsus, and therefore am a citizen of Rome! And I appeal to Cæsar. Let me be tried by him and by none other!

Mob: Give him to us! He is our prisoner!

Captain: Jews, you heard this man appeal to Cæsar. It is his right. I cannot deliver him to you. Soldiers! Surround this prisoner. Give way, men of Jerusalem. In the name of Cæsar and of Rome—give way!

[*The soldiers surround PAUL and march off.*]

SCENE VI

Announcer: The Apostle Paul is now taken by the

centurion to the city of Cæsarea, which is under Roman jurisdiction, that he may be accorded the right of trial of a Roman citizen. Felix, the Governor of Cæsarea, wishing to keep the favour of the Jews, postpones his trial and keeps Paul in prison. Two years elapse, and a new Governor takes office, Festus by name. He, too, fears to offend the Jews, and does not bring Paul to trial for his alleged offenses, but keeps him in prison. At length King Agrippa arrives in Cæsarea on a visit, and Festus, very much troubled, lays Paul's case before him.

Agrippa: Festus, where is this man of whom you speak?

Festus: He yet abides in the prison, King Agrippa.

Agrippa: But, Festus, he should have trial—to be condemned or freed. It is the Roman law.

Festus: This man has appealed to Cæsar; and I would fain send him to Rome for trial; but I have questioned him and his accusers, the Jews, and I can find no offense in the man; how can I send him before Cæsar when I cannot give the nature of his offense!

Agrippa: Festus, I wish to hear this man myself.

Festus: You shall hear him, King. Soldiers! Bring hither the prisoner, Paul.

Agrippa: There needs be *some* offense he hath committed, Festus, to have so outraged the Jews.

Festus: They have brought no charge of evil things, as I supposed they would, King Agrippa, but only certain questions of their own religion, chiefly concerning one Jesus, who they say is dead, but who this Paul says is alive.

Agrippa: If he has appealed to Cæsar, Festus—to Cæsar he shall go! Perhaps after examination you may

have something to write concerning him and his offense. But here comes your prisoner. Well, Festus, he is no common rascal; his bearing is that of a king!

[*Enter PAUL and guard.*]

Festus: A learned man, too, King Agrippa, as you yourself shall find! He writes—I cannot tell you all the letters he writes! One language is like another to him! Speak, Paul; the King would hear thy story.

Paul: King Agrippa, I think I am most happy that I am to make my defense before thee this day, touching all the things whereof I am accused. My manner of life from my youth up, which was from the beginning among my own nation, is known to all the Jews; and they can testify how after the straightest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

Agrippa: What is the manner of thy offense?

Paul: I stand here to be judged for the hope of a promise made of God unto our fathers—and concerning this hope I am accused.

Agrippa: What hope, Paul?

Paul: The resurrection of the dead, O King.

Agrippa: Paul, can such things be?

Paul: Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?

Agrippa: Come to the crux of thine offense, Paul.

Paul: King Agrippa, first hear a word concerning my life. Once I was the scourge of the Christian. I see you wonder, and well you may! I hated the name of Jesus of Nazareth—and I both shut up many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I gave my vote against them.

Not only in Jerusalem, King Agrippa, did I rage against the Christians: I persecuted them even unto foreign cities.

Agrippa: Paul, I cannot understand thy change of heart.

Paul: Hear me, and thou wilt understand. One day, as I journeyed to Damascus with my commission of persecution—at midday, O King, I saw a light from Heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them that journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth in terror, I heard a voice saying to me: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? I said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said: I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. I was sore afraid, King Agrippa, but the voice spoke, saying: Arise, Saul, and stand upon thy feet, for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee; to be my apostle to the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God.

Agrippa: Thy revelation fills me with wonder, Paul.

Paul: Whereupon, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision; but declared unto them of Damascus first, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God.

Agrippa: Festus, in such work there is no offense.

Paul: O King Agrippa, there is great offense to them who fear the truth! And now I stand before thee, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say would come: How that Christ must suffer, and how first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the Jews and Gentiles.

Festus: Paul, thou art mad! Thy great learning doth turn thee to madness!

Paul: I am not mad, most excellent Festus; but speak forth words of truth and soberness.

Agrippa: Festus, this man speaks with authority and wisdom.

Paul: Festus, King Agrippa knoweth of these things of which I speak; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him! King Agrippa, believest thou in the prophets? I know that thou believest!

Agrippa: Paul, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

Paul: I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am—except these bonds!

Agrippa: This man doeth nothing worthy of death, or of bonds.

Festus: Is it your will, O King, to set him free?

Agrippa: It is not in our power to release him; he must plead his case at Rome. Paul, thou might have been set at liberty, hadst thou not appealed to Cæsar.

[*Curtain.*]

SCENE VII

Announcer: After a dangerous journey Paul arrives in Rome. Contrary to his expectation, he is not brought to formal trial, but is allowed to take up his abode in Rome; and is left unmolested to carry on his work of evangelization. During this time the scattered Christian Church looks to Paul as its leader; and by his letter he holds the young Church together, and imprints upon its doctrines the indelible mark of his own personality.

Several years pass, and Paul realizes that the Romans no longer look upon him with good-natured indulgence; the Church he has so nobly sustained is

growing in power and in numbers, and Rome sees in it a threat to its own traditions and religion. The next and last scene of our story is laid in the dwelling of Paul at Rome. Here the apostle is dictating to a convert an epistle to his friend Timothy.

Paul: But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come. . . . (*A mutter of a crowd outside.*) Wait—my friend Lucas! What gathering is this without my dwelling?

Lucas: My father Paul, the Romans wax angry against thee and thy teachings. It were well for thee to flee Rome while there is yet time.

Paul: No. My work is here. (*Mutters from angry crowd, like a buzzing of angry bees.*)

Lucas: I fear for thy safety, Paul!

Paul: Take thy pen, Lucas, and write these words to my brethren: All that would live godly in Jesus Christ shall suffer persecution. I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. . . . [Curtain.]

Announcer: This ends the story of Saul of Tarsus, known to us as Paul, the Apostle.

RUTH

CHARACTERS: RUTH

BOAZ

NAOMI, her mother-in-law

A SERVANT

SCENES: 1. ON THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM

2. NAOMI'S ROOM

3. IN THE FIELD OF BOAZ

4. THE THRESHING HALL

SCENE I

Announcer: You may remember the beginning of the Book of Ruth: "A certain man of Bethlehem went to sojourn in the land of Moab, he and his wife Naomi, and his two sons." And you may further remember that when Naomi's husband died, her sons married women of the country of Moab. One bore the name of Orpah; the other, Ruth. And, carrying the story on, you will recall that the two sons of Naomi died; that she decided to return to her own people in Bethlehem; and that Orpah and Ruth determined to leave their own country, and to follow their mother-in-law.

By evening all three are footsore and weary, and Orpah has lapsed into a moody silence, already sorry that she has come. At the set of sun we find our three travellers pausing by the roadside, and we hear the voice of Ruth.

Ruth:

Rest here, Mother Naomi. The sun has set;
But still the heat of noon doth linger on,

And presses down upon the parching land.
Come, lean upon my arm, and rest thee here,
For thou art pale with weariness, my mother.

Naomi:

Oh, no more weary than thyself, my daughter;
For thou hast held my arm these many miles,
And I have leaned upon thee—heavily;
Too heavily, I fear, for thy young strength.
But look, Ruth; how silent sits thy sister,
As though already she did half repent
That she is come.

Ruth: I'll speak to her, Naomi,
For she hath lost herself in moody silence,
And needs a friendly voice to break the spell
Of lonely thoughts.
Orpah, come—sit not by thyself;
A little rest, and we shall take the road
And on the morrow enter Bethlehem.

Naomi:

She turns her face as though the sound were hateful.

Ruth:

Orpah, look yonder, where the breeze doth sway
The heavy hanging tassels of the grain.
See how they ripple—all the field's alive!
The wind doth cut the heavy sultry air,
And gives new life to every living thing!
Orpah, dost thou not feel new strength within thee?
Answer me, my sister—

Naomi:

O Ruth, doth thou not know what's in her heart?

Ruth:

Nay, mother, lest perchance 'tis loneliness,
To be here on the road to Bethlehem
At fall of night.

Naomi: O Ruth, not that alone.
She told me but a little while ago
The road seemed longer, wearier every hour,
And every moment brought her sadder thought.
Then I did lay my hand upon her own
And told her she must leave me—seek her people,
Not follow me. She struggles with herself.
That is the reason for her silence, Ruth.

Ruth:
Leave thee? Leave thee alone to go thy way?
Nay, Mother Naomi. Hold not her love so
lightly—
Lo! Orpah hath risen, as though to leave thee,
Mother!

Naomi:
Entreat her not, but let her go her way;
She cannot speak; her heart's too full for words.
Farewell, my daughter, Orpah. I blame thee not.
Return where thou mayst find thy happiness.

Ruth:
Since Orpah goes, why should I leave thee now?

Naomi:
O Ruth, my daughter, thou shouldst not be here,
Sharing with me the hardships of the road!
Thou shouldst, like her, return again to Moab;
For to what fate, what hardships now I lead thee
I know not!

Ruth: I am happy by thy side.

Naomi:
My daughter, I am but an aged woman.
Thou art still young, and all thy life before thee;
But I am old, and all my life behind me.
O Ruth, too far already art thou come.
Turn thou thy steps, nor shall I love thee less.

Ruth:

If Orpah goes, why, thou hast need of me
More than before. But I stay not for that.
I stay because I love thee, Mother Naomi.

Naomi:

Nay! Follow her before it is too late!

[*A voice calls.*]

She calls thee—go! Go, I do beseech thee!
Look, Ruth—look yonder at the road before thee!
How white, how dusty, how oppressed by heat!
Think of the weary miles before thee still!
Think of the loneliness of Bethlehem;
Friendless, in poverty, in want of bread
Perchance! Alone with me, an aged woman.
Alone in some dark, tiny, sunless room;
A crust of bread to share betwixt the twain—
No mirth, no happiness, no merry friends—

Ruth:

My happiness is where my love is given.

Naomi:

Nay, Ruth! Turn! Look the other way!
The road that Orpah follows, where it leads:
Home, friends, and all that makes life dear;
No famine for thee there, but bounteous fare.
No labour there to earn thy daily bread.
There thou canst 'broider linen in the shade,
And there perchance will come to thee the love
Of some good man, the joy of little children.

Ruth:

Oh, speak no more. Shake not my heart with
doubts!

Naomi:

Go, Ruth! Thy youth, thy youth awaits thee
there.

Ruth:

Mother Naomi, my love waits here beside thee,
And all thy protestations are in vain;
For I do that which brings me happiness—
To stay beside thee, and to care for thee.

Naomi:

To share my hunger and my poverty?

Ruth:

Oh, in the sharing we shall make them small,
And rob them of their terrors. Mother Naomi,
Think thou that I can let thee go alone
To face these things? What metal am I made of,
Now to abandon thee?

Naomi:

Oh, thou wilt yet regret thy generous heart.

Ruth:

I would regret a craven heart more sorely.

Naomi:

Look, Ruth—thy sister turns the bend o' the
road;
Join her, before she passes from our sight.

Ruth:

Mother Naomi, entreat me not to leave thee
And to return from following after thee;
For whither thou goest, I will go;
And where thou lodgest, I will lodge—

Naomi:

In a garret, perchance; in poverty and want!

Ruth:

So be it.

Naomi:

And thy youth will be wasted in a friendless land!

Ruth:

Thy people shall be my people.

Naomi:

O Ruth, even our worship will be alien to thee!

Ruth:

Thy God shall be my God;

Where thou diest, will I die,

And there will I be buried;

The Lord do so unto me

And more also,

If aught but death part thee and me.

Come, Mother—the night is cooler now;

Lean thou upon my arm; we'll take the road

That leads to Bethlehem—

[*They go out together.*]

SCENE II

Announcer: Ruth and Naomi continue their journey and reach Bethlehem. And now part of Naomi's prediction comes true: they feel the pinch of poverty and of hunger. And though she struggles bravely to hide it, there is a great loneliness in the heart of Ruth—a loneliness for the sound of familiar voices and the sight of familiar faces. Alone in the dark little room they share, Ruth gives vent to her desolate thoughts.

Ruth (by the tiny window):

A cell! A cell—no air, no light, no sun!

I feel a caged creature, shut away

From all that I have known. O loneliness,

Now do I know thy sting! This alien land;

No friendly face to greet me in the street;

But only people who pass me, hurrying by,

And see me not. O friendless, cruel city!

Here from this tiny window I can see

The streams of men and women passing by;

And not a one to call me by my name;

And not a one to care if I should die!
Only one friend—and she an agéd woman.
Oh, would that I had turned my steps that night
When Orpah left us on the road to Moab!
Would that I had returned to mine own people!—
Nor is it yet too late! I still can go!
Naomi will not chide me if I leave,
For she has urged me many, many times!
Oh, I must go! This tiny room's a cell,
In which my youth is languishing away,
And Bethlehem's a prison—I must go—
Now—on this very hour— [Knocking.]
She comes. I—I will not tell her—I cannot—

Naomi (without): Ruth, my daughter.

Ruth:

How weak her voice; its weakness shaketh me
And dulls my resolution. Yet I'll go! I'll go!
I cannot bear the loneliness—

Naomi (without): Ruth— [Enter NAOMI.]

Ruth:

Mother, thy voice is weak and trembling—

Naomi:

'Tis—nothing. 'Tis the climbing of the steps.

Ruth:

Mother, thy face is white—

Naomi:

'Tis but the dimness of the light, my daughter.

Ruth:

I see thee lean against the table edge,
As though a fatal weakness struck thee down!

Naomi:

I—I am not ill. I—I do but rest—me—here.

Ruth:

Wherefore wert thou so long?

Naomi: Look, Ruth—I've bread—
For thee!

Ruth: For me?

Naomi: Aye, all for thee, my dear.

Ruth:

Where is thy share?

Naomi: Already—I have had it.

Ruth:

Mother, tell all the truth! Thou hast not eaten!

Naomi:

I have—a goodly share—

Ruth:

'Tis hunger, mother,

That sets that deathly pallour in thy cheeks!

That makes thee tremble with a sudden weakness!

'Tis hunger—yet wouldst thou give me thy bread!

Naomi:

Art thou not hungry, O my daughter Ruth?

Hast thou not need of food as well as I?

Take it. I wish thee to.

Ruth:

I am not worthy

To touch the bread thou bringest, Mother Naomi.

Naomi:

Worthy? Why thou art worthy countless times!

Ruth:

Nay! Nay!

Naomi: Why weepest thou, my daughter?

Ruth:

'Tis—nothing—

Naomi:

Nay, 'tis loneliness, my dear.

Thou art a bird, that shut within a cage,

Doth pine again for its own native fields.

Look, dear—I open now the door for thee;

[*Opens door.*]

Oh, spread thy wings and find thy liberty!

Ruth:

Oh, speak not thus to me in gentleness,
For every word of thine is a reproach!

Naomi:

Go, my dear—go. Nay, nay—I will not hear thee!

Ruth:

I have been shaken to the very soul
With all the tortures of my loneliness;
But now—now, Mother Naomi—I am strong!
Now in the fields that lie about the city
Perchance some kindly man will let me glean
The scattered grain that lies upon the ground.
O Mother Naomi, I, who felt despair,
Am happy now. Happy, I know not why!
Farewell, farewell—all shall be well, my mother!

Naomi:

Farewell, thou loyal and unselfish one! Farewell!
[*Exit RUTH. A pause.*]

Lord God of Israel, who brought me forth
Safely, and led me to this humble place,
I thank thee, and for thy protecting wings
That shelter me throughout the day and night.
And may Thou guard the one I love, and send
Her happiness. Not for myself I ask
These things; for I am old and tired,
And ready to be gathered to Thine arms.
But let my eyes see her in happiness
Before I go. Let me see children there
Upon her breast, to bless her and her seed,
And all the seed of Israel that follow!
Not for myself, O God, not for myself—
This dark room and a crust of bread for me—
But for my daughter Ruth: Give her the love
Of some strong man—the joy of little children!

SCENE III

Announcer: Ruth leaves the dark room, and at evening we find her on the edge of a field of grain outside the city of Bethlehem. She clutches in her hand a small sack in which she hopes to gather a few grains of barley-corn which the reapers have left behind them. But as she enters the field, she stands a moment. Over the swaying tops of the ripened grain, which undulate in the twilight breeze, comes the song of the reapers, mellowed by the distance. Standing a short distance from the unsuspecting Ruth is Boaz, the owner of the field, a rich man whose lands are fertile and prosperous. He, too, listens to the song of his reapers in the twilight.
[*At curtain Boaz is discovered.*]

Song (off-stage):

The tall grain falls before the scythe;

The barley-corn upon the ground

Is yellow as a maiden's hair.

We bind it round and round and round!

We reap the grain,

And then again

We bind it round and round and round!

Oh, give us of Thy smiling sun,

O Lord! and give us of Thy rain.

And let each field be rich with corn

And when we fall the ripened grain

Oh, let us raise

To Thee our praise,

O Lord! Again, again, again!

Boaz:

How soft yon music, borne by the breeze,

Drifts now across the twilight fields of grain.

[*Music of a harp.*]

Lo now the harp doth breathe its soft lament,
To cast a spell of music on mine ears!
And yet, though I am master of these lands;
Though I am rich, and vested with some power;
And though the name of Boaz is known in
Judah,

From Bethlehem unto the distant mountain—
Though I am thought most fortunate of men,
I am not. Oh, far happier is he
Who, with his humble instrument, doth call
Such magic music from the muted strings.
For I, who have these riches, lack one thing—
And lacking that, I have no happiness.
'Tis love. Oh, not the love of flattering knaves,
Or maidens who would love me for my lands,
Or for the jewels I can give to them.
For there be many who would love me thus:
But I would have one love me—for myself.

Man (entering):

My lord, Boaz.

Boaz: Good lad, I did not see thee coming.
For I was listening to yonder music,
And watching how the sunset paints the horizon,
With red and gold on every fleecy cloud.

Man:

My lord, thy pardon thus to break thy thoughts.
But there is come into thy fields a woman—
A stranger—who doth ask of me permission
To glean between the rows of bundled grain.
What is thy will? Look—where she waits thy
word—

Boaz:

I see her not.

Man: Stand here, my lord. Yonder.

Boaz:

Methinks the twilight doth deceive mine eyes,
To give such beauty to her!

Man: Nay, my lord,

She is most beautiful: not garish beauty,
But such as springs from an untroubled heart,
And doth illumine all her gentle face.

Boaz:

She sees us not.

Man: Shall I call her, my lord?

Boaz:

Nay, nay. Tell her that she may glean the
grain;

But tell her not that I am watching her,
For I can see that she's not overbold:
Know'st thou her name?

Man: My lord, I know it not.

Look, Boaz, where she doth approach this place,
Where we now stand.

Boaz: I'll speak to her myself;

But get thee hence; I would not have her know
That I am master of these rolling fields;
For knowing that, she will not speak to me,
Save as a servant to a master. Nay!
I'll have her think that I am but a reaper—
The garment that I wear is humble enough!
Give me the scythe, boy. (*Takes scythe.*) There.
Now get thee gone.

Man:

I go, my lord. [*Exit MAN. A pause.*]

Boaz (looking off-stage):

O what a light of gentleness is there
Upon her brow! A beauty springing deep
From out a gentle spirit. I know not why,

But sight of her more deeply shaketh me,
Than all the fairest women of Judea.
Fie! Fie, Boaz! She's but a stranger girl,
Who in her poverty hath come to glean,
And thou art master of an hundred men,
The lord of many fields. Come! Art thou moved
By this lone wandering girl who gleans thy field?
What would be said of thee in Bethlehem,
If it were known that thy heart was moved,
By one whose very name thou knoweth not!
She comes! So close she comes I see the glint
Of gold the twilight sun hath wakened there
Upon her unbound hair! Almost I fear
To call, lest voice of mine may frighten her.
Yet I must speak, else she will pass me by,
And know not that I'm here. Maiden, maiden!
Ruth (off a small distance. Then entering):
Oh! Who calls me?

Boaz:

Fear not. I see that thou art come to glean?

Ruth:

If it be granted me by him who owns
The field. If not, I'll go.

Boaz:

Go not, maiden.

Glean where thou wilt, and none shall say thee
nay.

I know the master of this field—maiden—

Ruth:

Thou art a reaper, and dost work for him?

Boaz:

I work for him; and since I know him well,
He will not stop thee if thou gleanest here.

Ruth:

I shall not take more than this cloth will hold.

Boaz:

Nay! Thou shalt take a plenty! All thou wilt!

Ruth:

Good reaper, are indeed all men so kind
In Bethlehem?

Boaz: Thou art a stranger, maiden?

Ruth:

From out the land of Moab.

Boaz: And thy name?

Ruth: They call me Ruth.

Boaz:

Ruth, art thou hungry that thou needst must glean
Here in the twilight in a stranger's field?

Ruth:

Not only I, but also one I love.

Boaz:

Love! Ah, thou art married?

Ruth:

Nay, I spake of my mother;

'Tis for her sake that I am come to glean.

For she is old, and I must care for her.

Boaz:

Ah, Ruth, the maidens here in Bethlehem
Think of themselves; they do not come to glean,
But rather let their mothers glean for them!
Why art thou come here from the land of Moab?

Ruth:

My mother had need of me—and so I came.
For what is mine is hers, and hers is mine.
For such the love that binds us that her joys
And mine are intermingled—and our sorrows, too.

Boaz:

Oh, grant that there will be no sorrows for thee
But only joy!

Ruth:

Good reaper, none hath spoken

With such a gentle, friendly voice to me
Since I did leave my native land of Moab.
Oh, thou hath banished all my loneliness,
That like a shadow darkened all my heart.

Boaz:

I, too, am lonely, maiden—as lonely as thee.

Ruth:

Thou?

Boaz:

Even I. O Ruth, think not
That I am speaking with too bold a tongue—
But grant that I may see thee once again.

[*Music of a harp.*]

Ruth:

Harvester, the night draws on, and I must glean
Whilst there is light.

Boaz:

Listen, how faint the harp
Doth float upon the gentle evening wind!

Ruth:

Nay—I must go; I'll see thee on the morrow.
I shall be gleaning here among the sheaves,
Perchance in this same field?

Boaz:

Listen—do as I bid thee;
To-night we hold a joyous harvest feast,
To thresh the grain, and praise the Lord our God.
Come thou thyself to yonder threshing floor;
I shall be there among the harvesters;
Join thou our merriment; sit at the feast
As guest of mine; and when the feast is done
Perchance the master of these rolling fields
Will give thee of his plenty.

Ruth:

If I come,
Will they admit me? I am but a stranger.

Boaz:

Fear not, maiden; I shall be there to greet thee.

Ruth: Farewell,
I'll come to-night to join the festival.

Boaz:
Farewell, Ruth. Farewell— [Exit BOAZ.]

Ruth:
He goes, and there is something in his voice
So gentle I forget my loneliness!
And there is something waking in my heart,
That troubles me, and yet doth give me joy.
Why he hath spoken to me but a moment,
Yet it doth seem I've known him forever!
Oh, I shall go unto the threshing floor
If only that he's there and I shall see him!
And now, this land that was a place of strangers,
Is friendly, for one gentle voice hath driven
The shadows from my heart. O harvester,
I came to glean the corn. 'Tis love I glean!
[The music of the harp dies away in the distance.]

SCENE IV

Announcer: That night Boaz and his harvesters gather in the threshing hall to make merry, and to give thanks for the rich harvest. Boaz, lord of the festival, hears the music and laughter, but his eyes are not upon the merrymakers. He watches the door of the hall, and as the night draws on he feels that Ruth will not come, and a moody silence replaces his former gaiety.

[Curtain. BOAZ sits moodily in a chair. Sound of merrymaking off-stage.]

Man:

Come, my Lord Boaz! Join our merriment.
For the last hour I have seen thee here
Searching the faces of the harvesters,
And watching yonder door. Whom seekest thou?

Boaz:

None, good lad.

Man:

Nay, Boaz, thou art sitting by thyself—

Boaz:

Good boy, hast thou been near the door this night?

Man:

I have, my lord.

Boaz: Hath any asked for me?

Man: No, my lord.

Boaz:

Hast thou seen any maiden lingering there,
As though she feared to enter?

Man: Nay, my lord Boaz. None.

[*MAN goes out. Laughing harvesters pass by.*
Music comes.]

Boaz (when he is alone):

Ah, Ruth, Ruth—why fearest thou to come?
These hours I have waited for thee here,
And all the music a discordant sound,
And all the laughter empty to mine ears
Because thou art not with me!

Man (distant over the music):

My lord, Boaz!

Boaz: Well, boy?

[*Enter MAN.*]

Man:

There is a maiden yonder
Who seeks to find some harvester, my lord;
His name she knows not, but he bade her come
And join our feast this night.

Boaz:

Where?

Man:

She is yonder, my lord.
Methinks her beauty graces this thy feast!
Look, my lord, she peers upon the faces

Of all thy harvesters—and turns away
As though the one she sought was not within.

Boaz:

Quick, ere she turns to go! Bring her to me.

Man:

HERE, my lord, to *thee*?

Boaz: Aye!

Man (calling from side of stage):

Maiden, come hither.

The master of the feast would speak to thee.

[*He goes out. There is a pause;
then RUTH enters.*]

Boaz:

Ruth. Search no longer for thy harvester
For he is here beside thee.

Ruth: Thou—art he!

Boaz:

Aye, Ruth. The same who bade thee glean at
even.

Ruth:

Thou—the master of this festive hall!

Boaz:

Think not unkindly that I did deceive thee.

Ruth:

Was it a jest to bring me thus before thee?

Boaz:

Ah, Ruth, this even when I met thee there
Among the ripening corn, I feared to tell thee
That I was master of these rolling fields,
Lest it should be a barrier betwixt us.

Ruth:

Oh, I would have thee still a harvester,
That I might meet thee once again at even,
When twilight falls upon the ripening sheaves.

But, nay. How far art thou above me, Boaz!
I, who am but a gleaner in thy fields—

Boaz:

Oh, thou hast gleaned more than my grain, my love;
My heart also hast thou garnered there.
The full sheaf of my heart is all thine own.

Ruth:

I, who am but a stranger in thy land?

Boaz:

Be not a stranger to my heart this night.

Ruth:

Oh, hast thou wakened that within my heart
That cannot find its utterance!

Boaz:

It is not meet, my love, that where I reap
Thou shouldst but glean the tiny scattered grain.
Oh, share thou all my harvest—and my home.

Ruth:

Thy words are like the words within a dream—
I fear to waken, and to see thee gone!

Boaz:

If this be dreaming, let us dream forever.

Ruth:

I love thee;

I love thee for thy tender gentleness;
But not alone for that; I know not why
I love thee! Unless, O Boaz—for thyself!
And wert thou but a humble harvester
I still should love thee.

Boaz: O beloved, listen— [*Music of harp, distant.*]

How gently yonder music throws its spell,
To seal the covenant of this our love!
Be thou mine own, this night—to-morrow, forever.
O gentle Ruth, I give thee all my heart.

THE MESSAGE FROM SINAI

CHARACTERS: MOSES, the Prophet A MAN OF THE TRIBE

ALAAM

AARON

LATHRA

CROWD

SCENES: 1. THE TENT OF MOSES

2. THE TENT OF AARON

3. BY THE GOLDEN CALF

4. ON THE HEIGHTS OF MOUNT SINAI

5. IN THE CAMP OF MOSES' PEOPLE

SCENE I

Announcer: Centuries ago, under the shadow of Mount Sinai, the children of Israel pitched their tents in the wilderness. They had been delivered out of the bondage of Egypt; they had crossed the Red Sea in safety, and had seen the pursuing chariots of Pharaoh engulfed in the waves; they had escaped starvation, for manna had fallen upon the desert, as from heaven. Forty years had they wandered in the wilderness, and during these forty years they were dependent upon the judgment, the wisdom, the courage of him who led them, Moses the Lawgiver.

And now, under the bleak cliffs of Sinai, in that barren desert that stretches for miles around, we find the children of Israel, gathered before the tent of Moses to ask him to dispense justice.

[MOSES and AARON

discovered as curtain rises.]

Alaam (outside): Hear me, O Moses, and do justice, for my cause is righteous!

Jathra (outside): Nay, thou judge of Israell! Hearken not unto the voice of mine enemy, for the right doth lie upon my side; give thy judgment to *me!*

[*Mutters from the people assembled outside.*]

Alaam (outside): My father, Moses! This man Jathra speaks with the voice of deception, and his testimony is a fabric of evil!

Voices: Thy judgment, Moses! Thy judgment betwixt these men!

Moses: Aaron—

Aaron: My father—

Moses: Come hither, Aaron, to my side.

Aaron: Speak, judge of Israel—

Moses: I would see justice done, and yet to-night I have a heavier matter on my heart.

Aaron: What troubles thee, my father?

Moses: Aaron, thou art a leader of my people. When I am gone, wilt thou sit here in judgment, even as I have done?

Aaron: Speak not of thy going, O my father; for thou art strong in limb, not weak and old; thou wilt be with us many, many years.

Moses: Nay, Aaron. Not many years—a few, perhaps. And may God grant that with mine eyes I may see this wandering tribe, a nation! But that is not whereof I would speak to thee; it doth concern a matter greater than my life.

Aaron: What matter greater than thy life, Moses? For thy life is the life of this tribe of Israel; and thy law is the law of this people.

Moses: Aye, my Law. But my Law shall perish. My Law is fallible.

Voices (outside): Thy judgment, Moses! We seek justice!

Aaron: The people clamour again to have thy wisdom.

Moses: Let them enter, Aaron; for that which I would say to thee is for them also.

Aaron: Enter, ye people who seek judgment, enter.

[*Enter ALAAM, JATHRA, and crowd.*]

Alaam: O Lawgiver of Israel, hear thou my cause and do justice: This man who stands beside me hath stolen that which is mine, and hath placed a slander upon my name; not only this, but he has also—

Jathra: Nay, my father! Hearken not unto mine enemy, who seeks to confound thee with lies!

Voices: Thy judgment, Moses! Thy judgment!

Alaam: He hath stolen my substance, and hath brought shame upon me in the eyes of the people!

Moses: My children, cease thy pleading—and come not this night before me to ask justice.

Voice: Moses! Wilt thou not give thy judgment betwixt us—who are come here to thy tent to seek the law?

Moses: My people, to-night I shall not sit in judgment. (*Mutters from crowd.*) I hear ye mutter, and I see your faces turned towards me in wonder.

A Man: Art thou not our Lawgiver, Moses? Who else shall give the law unto us?

Moses: Hear me, O my children; that ye may understand wherefore I will not sit in judgment this night.

A Man: Speak.

Moses: Upon my shoulders have been the burdens of this tribe of Israel; for forty years I have sat in judgment, releasing the innocent man and punishing the guilty. This ye know, my children.

Voices: Aye! Thou hast judged us long— And well!

Moses: This tribe of Israel has been a wandering tribe; nomads of the wilderness and desert. But soon

your eyes shall look upon the promised land, and you shall become a nation before the eyes of the world!

A Man: And thou shalt rule us and give unto us the law! O Moses—

Moses: No man, no matter who he be, can make the law upon which a nation is established.

A Man: But thou art wise, Moses! We have faith in thee!

Voices: Aye, thou art wise. We will abide by thy laws, Moses. We ask no other law but thine.

Moses: My people, the time hath come for us to see a firmer foundation than my wisdom—a firmer foundation than any man can build.

A Man: But Moses, where shall we find such a foundation?

Moses: To-night I go to Sinai—to yonder mountain that looms above our tents, and thrusts its summit into the veil of night. On yon bleak height I shall seek the Lord my God, and offer up my prayer unto him; and, since the Lord hath not been silent to my supplications, but hath ever answered them with justice and with mercy, I know that He will not be silent this night; but will give into my hands the laws that shall be the guidance of our people, from now unto the end of time!

A Man: O Moses, go not to Sinai this night; remain thou with us, and be *thou* our lawgiver; for we know not what laws the Lord God may give unto thee. They may be commands too strait, too hard, for this thy people. We wish *thy* law, Moses! [*Voices in assent.*]

Moses: Nay. Let us not build upon the fallible judgment of man—for no man is wise in all things—but let our foundation be upon the word of God, whose wisdom faileth never. And now, my people, abide ye in patience; and if a night passeth, and a day, and yet

another night, and I am not returned from the heights of Sinai, keep yourselves pure in heart, and worthy in all ways to receive the laws of God that I hope I shall bring unto thee. And now farewell. I go to seek my God, upon the heights of Sinai. [*Curtain.*]

SCENE II

Announcer: Moses leaves the tents of Israel, and goes up onto the mountain. A week passes, another week, and he does not return. Deprived of their leader, the tribe of Israel waits, at first patiently, then with a growing discontent and lack of confidence in Moses. Even Aaron, one of the leaders of the tribe, begins to doubt that Moses will return from Sinai; and he sees that here is an opportunity to take upon himself the command of the people of Israel. Alone in his tent, Aaron listens to the sound of revelry that rises from every side. The people have forgotten Moses; have forgotten their God.

[*Sound of revelry and laughter outside.*]

Aaron (alone): Ah, Moses, if thou wert to return now from the heights of Sinai, what wouldst thou think of this thy people? Pleasure is their God, and their worship is revelry, both night and day! But thou wilt not return, O mighty lawgiver. Thou art dead upon the crags of the mountain, else thou wouldst have come unto us ere now. [*Sound of revelry comes closer.*]

Voices (outside): Aaron! Aaron!

Aaron: Who calls to me with such impatient voice?

[*Enter a man.*]

A Man: Aaron! Join thou our revelry!

[*Crowd enters.*]

Aaron: What fools are ye, O children of Israel, to

turn your faces from the Lord, and to abandon yourselves to pleasure!

A Man: Nay! What fools were we to forsake pleasure these many years—and to listen to the voice of Moses!
[*Shouts in assent.*]

Voices: Aye! True enough. [*Etc.*]

Aaron: What—what if Moses returns, to find ye at your mad revelry!

A Man: Moses will not return! He is dead on the heights of Sinai! Go yourself, Aaron, and you will find his body on the cliffs!

Aaron: My people, did he not command us to be patient? He may yet return!

A Man: Let him return! We fear him not! We want no such lawgivers who forbid us all pleasures!

Voices: No! Let us be merry. [*Etc.*]

Aaron: O children of Israel! Is it thus that ye will establish a great nation?

A Man: Aaron, we would be as other nations! They seek pleasure! Let us do likewise!

Aaron: But such nations fall! Ye have seen the wrath of the Lord strike upon them like the lightning!

A Man: We fear not! We renounce the God of Moses! We wish no unseen God! Let us have a god such as the Egyptians, a god that can be seen, a god that can be borne before us as we march into the promised land!

Voices: Aye! Let us have a god that all men can see! A god like the gods of Egypt!

Aaron: Oh, my people, why would ye copy the vices of other nations!

A Man: Aaron, make thou a god for us that can be seen by all men—and thou shalt be the leader of this tribe of Israel!

Aaron: I—I would not set up vain and idolatrous gods!
And yet—I see that ye are resolved upon this thing—

Voices: We are! Even so! Thou shalt be the leader!

Aaron: O my people, fain would I be your leader.
But ask me not to set up a graven image for you!

A Man: Then we shall do it ourselves!

[*Shouts in assent.*]

Aaron: Children of Israel! Do ye not see that ye
cannot build a mighty nation without laws? How shall
a graven image give forth justice!

A Man: We wish no laws! Let every man be a law
unto himself!

Voices: Aye! A law unto himself! (*Etc.*)

Aaron: Oh, this that ye say is a worse folly than the
worship of idols!

A Man: Aaron, can we find in thee a leader who will
do as we ask, or shall we seek another? Wilt thou give
us a god that all men can see?

Aaron: I—I see that ye will have this thing. I—I
will give you such a god. It shall be a god that ye can
understand, O people of Israel, a god of gold, since I
see that already ye worship this thing! Break off the
golden rings, which are in the ears of your wives, of
your sons, and of your daughters—and I will make ye
a golden calf. Then can ye say: "This is the god of
Israel!"

[*Mob shout. Curtain.*]

SCENE III

Announcer: A week has passed, a week of feasting
and license. Within the camp a mad orgy is at its
height. About the figure of the golden calf the people
dance in utter abandon! Their drunken shouts desecrate
the silence of the desert. The campfires leap high
and in the glow of the flames men and women surge as

at a devil's carnival. They seem to be not men, but beasts mad with passion, and the golden calf the symbol of their lust.

And now, through the encircling rim of darkness, hurries a figure clothed in white, and bearing two stone tablets on which are graven an everlasting code of Law. But the people are thinking neither of laws nor of God. Maddier and madder the orgy now! Beneath the pedestal of the golden calf they bow in drunken worship.

[The noise of orgies continues for some time—music, laughter, shouts, clanging of a gong, cursing. A golden calf on a pedestal. People dance round it.]

Jathra: Lo! Now we have a god that all men can see—a god of gleaming gold! Shall we not offer this human sacrifice before the golden calf!

Mob: Ayel! The sacrifice! The sacrifice! A human sacrifice! Blood! Blood! The blood of man!

[The mob drags on a victim.]

Jathra: Come, drag him hither. Lay him upon the altar of the golden calf! *[A groan—a cry for mercy.]*

Victim: O people of Israel, have mercy upon me! Offer me not to sacrifice! Spare me!

Jathra: Cry for mercy to the golden calf! See if he will grant thee mercy! *[Laughter.]*

Victim: Why do ye sacrifice me, O people of Israel? Because I will not bow down to your golden idol! Because my faith is in the God of Moses!

Jathra: The God of Moses! *(Laughter.)* The Unseen God! *(Laughter.)* Is thy God apparelled in fine gold? Can thy God be seen, touched, borne aloft like a banner in battle? People of Israel, do we want gods we cannot see? *[Yells.]*

Voices: Nay! Never! For us the golden calf!
(*Then a cruel chant.*) To the sword with him! To the sword! To the sword!

Jathra: Man, look upon this sword! Soon thou wilt see thy God—unless, perchance, he is invisible, in heaven as on earth! [*Laughter.*]

Victim: I know my God liveth, and ye who worship this golden idol shall know His wrath!

Jathra: Thy God is dead—like Moses, who went forth to bring us law!

Voices: Law! [*Laughter.*]

Jathra: And now, O calf of gold, thou graven image that all men can see, to thee do we offer the blood of this human sacrifice!

Moses (distant): Hold—hold thy sword!

Voice: Moses—the voice of Moses—risen from the dead! [*Mutter of many voices.*]

Moses (entering with tablet of stone): O my people—my people! What is this ye do. (*With mounting anger.*) O false and idolatrous generation! Is this how ye keep yourselves pure and worthy to receive the laws of God? What revels are these—what mad orgies—what wicked sacrifice of human blood! What golden idol that ye worship! O evil, evil generation! Ye thought me dead—ye abandoned your God! What punishment shall be yours! What awful wrath shall strike ye like the whirlwind! [*Groans and mutters.*]

Jathra: Thy mercy—O Moses—thy mercy—

Moses: No mercy, but punishment, shall be thine! Your dancing shall be turned to mourning, and your laughter to lamentation!

Jathra: Lay not thy curse upon us!

Moses: Is this your god—this calf of gold? *Must* ye have idols?

Jathra: We wished a god like the god of other nations, O Moses.

Moses: Ye shall not worship idols! (*Moses casts down the golden calf.*) *There* lies your calf of gold! Let it be burnt with fire, and ground to powder, and strewn upon the face of the waters—and ye may drink thereof! Who led ye in this folly? What man turned ye from the ways of God? Aaron! I left thee in command! Aaron—come hither! I see thee—come hither!

Aaron: My father, we thought thee dead—

Moses: Because ye think me dead shall ye turn to idols!

Aaron: Let not the anger of my lord wax hot; thou knowest the people—that they are set on evil!

Moses: Thou shouldst have turned them from evil!

Aaron: Moses, I could not—though I did strive to do so. For they came unto me and said: “Make us gods which shall go before us—a god that all men can see.” and so— I made this calf of gold.

Moses: Was it for this, O my people, that I ascended unto the heights of Sinai and brought down these tablets of stone graven with eternal law by the hand of God Himself! Look upon them! Look upon them!

Aaron: O Moses, my father! Give unto thy people this Law of God, for it shall save them from destruction!

Moses: Ye are not worthy of the Law of God I bring you! Nay! Here do I break the tablets into a thousand pieces, even as ye have broken my faith in you—O wicked and perverse generation!

[*MOSES dashes the tablet on the ground. Curtain.*]

SCENE IV

Announcer: Having broken the tablets of stone on which were graven the laws given him by God, Moses

returns to the heights of Sinai, sick at heart that his people have so wickedly betrayed their faith. There, upon the desolate heights, he meditates: He sees, as in a vision, a lawless people perishing in the wilderness, a people abandoning themselves to despair. And the thought touches his heart, and above the voice of the storm he raises once more his prayer to God.

Moses (alone): O Lord God, this my people have sinned a great sin, and (*sound of storm and thunder*) have made them gods of gold! Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin— O Lord God, abandon them not to their iniquity, for they are like sheep that wander in the wilderness, and are leaderless at the fall of night. O Lord God, Thou art a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. Forgive Thou the sin of this my people! Hear my prayer, O God: Here on this desolate mountain I come to Thee once again; give into my hands the eternal Law that Thou didst bestow upon me, and that I, in mine anger, did shatter on the ground! Here, in this night, with the tempest all about me, and the voice of the thunder in mine ears, speak to me, O God! (*Thunder.*)

I ask not for myself, O God, for my days draw nigh to their close; but I beseech Thee for my people! And not for them alone, but for all the generations of men that shall come! (*Thunder.*) Give me Thine eternal Law, that like this mountain, shall endure forever!

Law, that shall be a light in the darkness, brighter than the light of the sun!

Law, that shall heal the bitterness of men.

Law, that shall be merciful, wise, and everlasting!

Trace Thy Commandments upon these tablets of stone, that all men may read—and, reading, may find wisdom! (*Thunder.*) Oh, the lightning! I see—I see the words! “I—am—the—Lord—thy—God. God—which—brought—thee—out—of—the—land. Land—of—Egypt—Thou shalt have none other gods before me— (*Thunder.*) [Curtain.]

SCENE V

Announcer: Meanwhile, in the camp of the children of Israel, there is no sound of revelry and rejoicing. No; the sounds of lamentation rise from a stricken people. Lawless, leaderless, they perish in the wilderness. Injustice and murder stalk the camp, striking alike the innocent and guilty. No man's life or property is safe. Sickness and death cast their shadows over the tents.

Jathra (kneeling with people before AARON's tent): Oh, save us, Aaron—save us, for we perish! Hear the moans of thy people.

Voices: We perish! Woe is ours! Death and misery is ours, O Israel! [Enter AARON.]

Aaron: I cannot save you, people of Israel—

A Man: Oh, who shall save us from destruction? The food whereof we live is gone, and starvation stalks among us! I, I had grain, Aaron—no great store, but enough for myself and for my children—and, lo, ruthless men have come and seized it, saying: “Give us thy grain, or we slay thee!” And, fearing them, I gave it, for the wicked have slain many, and stolen all their possessions!

Aaron: Children of Israel—

A Man: Speak, Aaron! Do thou justice!

Aaron: Nay! Ye have turned your backs upon jus-

tice; ye have said: "There is no law!" (*Moans.*) "There is no God!" "Let every man be a law unto himself!" (*Moans.*) Well, what now, O people, what now! Why are ye come to me? Seek salvation from idols, since ye have turned your faces from the living God!

Jathra: Have mercy, Aaron! Save us from our folly, for we repent!

Aaron: Repent? Aye, now ye repent! A little while ago ye shouted defiance to God—ye danced the dances of shame! Why dance ye not now? Why do ye grovel in the dust?

Jathra: Our shame is on us! Our folly is clear before us!

Aaron: Folly—aye, folly! Ye had the Law that would have saved the people, and brought justice to all men—and were ye worthy to receive it? Go yonder, and find the fragments on the ground! That is all the law ye are worthy to receive!

A Man: Aaron, will our father Moses abandon us to death in the wilderness?

Aaron: Have ye not driven him away with your iniquities?

A Man: Oh, go forth to the mountain, Aaron—and beseech him to return unto us! We perish!

Aaron: He will not return! He has cast you off! (*Groans.*) Go search out them who led you in your folly; ask them to save you! Why do ye come here, now, seeking counsel of me? Did ye listen to my warning? No; ye laughed me to scorn. And did I not prophesy that all this should come to pass? I know ye, people of Israel! I know the wickedness of your hearts! Ye come hither seeking my counsel only because ye are desperate; but I have no counsel for you!

Ye have wished freedom from law—now ye have it! Go seek a stone, and worship it—ha! And it may give you justice. (*The sound of lamentation comes louder than before. Thunder.*) Wait! Cease—cease your lamentation! (*It ceases.*) What figure is this that cometh towards us from Sinai, where the storm rages?

Voices (at first very low and rising): Moses—Moses—Moses—Moses—Moses! [*Thunder.*]

Jathra: The thunder speaks! Moses comes to destroy us!

Aaron: Aye, tremble now, ye children of Israel; for Moses hath come hither to curse you for your iniquity; and to witness the awful vengeance of a righteous God!

Voices: Moses— Have mercy— Thy mercy, O father!

Aaron: His face—his face shineth as the lightning! Almost I fear to look upon it! [*Enter MOSES.*]

A Man: O Moses, our father, we have sinned; look thou upon the fruit of our iniquity! Behold, and see our reproach! The crown is fallen from our head. Woe unto us, for we have sinned! Destroy us not with the thunder of God!

Aaron: He answers not. He speaks not. He hath abandoned thee, O wicked generation!

Moses: O my people, my people! Ye have indeed been sorely punished.

A Man: My father, look upon us. We are a stricken people. There is no man to do justice, for Aaron hath turned his face from us!

Moses: My children, I come not to turn my face from ye, but to bring ye that which ye did once deny.

Voice: Give to us the Law—for without it we perish!

Moses: So shall all nations perish, my children, who turn their face from this Law I bring to you.

Aaron: My father, this is a wicked people who will keep no law, but will throw it aside and trample it under foot. They have come hither asking me for law, but I say: "Let them perish."

Moses: Aaron, the Law I bring is a just Law, and a Law of mercy. And they who follow it shall be saved; and they who break it shall perish. Yours is the choice—whether you will perish, or live! O my people, believe ye now that ye can live without Law—believe ye now that every man is a law unto himself? I see ye turn your faces from me in shame. Nay! Raise them, and receive that which God hath sent to you. (*Mob assent.*) Hear ye the words of the Lord, given to me on Mount Sinai:

THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.

This is the First Commandment. Break it not!

THOU SHALT NOT MAKE UNTO THEE ANY GRAVEN IMAGE, OR ANY LIKENESS OF ANY THING THAT IS IN HEAVEN ABOVE, OR THAT IS IN THE EARTH BENEATH, OR THAT IS IN THE WATER UNDER THE EARTH: THOU SHALT NOT BOW DOWN THYSELF TO THEM, NOR SERVE THEM: FOR I THE LORD THY GOD AM A JEALOUS GOD, VISITING THE INIQUITY OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN UNTO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION OF THEM THAT HATE ME; AND SHOWING MERCY UNTO THOUSANDS OF THEM THAT LOVE ME, AND KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS. [*Mob response, as to a prayer.*]

And this also: THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN; FOR, O my people, THE LORD WILL NOT HOLD HIM GUILTLESS THAT TAKETH HIS NAME IN VAIN.

Also: REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY, TO KEEP IT

HOLY. SIX DAYS SHALT THOU LABOUR, AND DO ALL THY WORK; BUT THE SEVENTH DAY IS THE SABBATH OF THE LORD THY GOD.

And now, these be the laws upon which thy nation shall endure; hearken unto them:

HONOUR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER, THAT THY DAYS MAY BE LONG UPON THE LAND WHICH THE LORD THY GOD GAVETH THEE.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL.

THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.

THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.

THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOUR.

THOU SHALT NOT COVET.

These be the Ten Commandments of the Lord thy God, upon which shall all Law be established.

Law, Eternal Law, that like unto yonder mountain shall endure forever!

Law that shall be a light in the darkness—brighter than the light of the sun!

Law that shall heal the bitterness of men.

Law that is merciful, wise, and everlasting!

8

COURAGE

CHARACTERS: DAVID	SAUL, the King
JESSE, his father	CAPTAIN
ELIAB, his brother	FIRST SOLDIER
	SECOND SOLDIER

SCENES: 1. A HILLSIDE NEAR DAVID'S HOME. TWILIGHT.
 2. THE CAMP OF SAUL'S ARMY
 3. THE TENT OF KING SAUL
 4. THE CAMP OF SAUL'S ARMY

SCENE I

Announcer: It is centuries ago. On a rolling hillside in the land of Israel, sits a disconsolate boy, looking toward the distant and alluring horizon with eager eyes, and wondering if he will ever venture into the far-away lands that seem to beckon him. Around him cluster a small flock of sheep that have sought the protection to their shepherd at the fall of night. For night is almost here.

The shadows deepen; from the hills comes the savage cry of marauding wolves, and the boy's fingers close tighter round the sling that he holds in his hand. The wind grows colder, and he draws his cloak closer about him. To the east the first star of evening rises, serene and white. From the little village nestled at the foot of the hill come the lights, one by one. Music, softened by the distance, floats into the twilight. The call of a night bird sounds from afar. Then silence.

Suddenly a voice, calling; again. The boy rises to his feet, straining to see through the dim light.

David:

Who comes hither?

Jesse (afar): David!

David:

It is my father's voice. What brings him here,
Searching me upon this lonely hillside?

Jesse (nearer): David.

David: Father, what hath brought thee here?

[*Enter* JESSE.]

Jesse:

My son, 'tis time thy sheep were in the fold—
Not here upon the lonely mountainside.

David:

I did forget how late the hour.

Jesse:

Forget? Ah, thou art dreaming here again?

David:

Aye; hast thou not dreamed, my father?

Jesse:

Come! We must not tarry. Thy mother awaits
thee.

She thought thee lost.

David: I—lost within these hills?

Jesse:

I told her that no danger could befall thee;
But since she worried, I did come to seek thee.

David:

I know these hills, my father. Too well perhaps!
'Tis all I know; perchance all I shall know.

Jesse:

David, art discontented in thy home?

David:

I would say no; and yet my heart says, Yes.

Jesse:

My son, I know thy thought; nay, let me speak:
It is thy brother's going to the wars
That hath so hotly raised thy discontent.
Is it not so?

David:

O father, if thou wert young
Wouldst thou stay willingly beside these sheep
And never see what lies beyond the hills;
Never have chance to show thyself a man—
But only be a shepherd to thy death?
And wouldst thou see thy brother marching off,
Where fame awaits, and not feel discontent?

Jesse:

Abide in patience, my son. Thine hour will come.

David:

O father, thou sayest this to comfort me:

Jesse:

Nay, nay.

David:

What hour will come, here—in these lonely hills,
Where every day is even as the last?
And every morrow like to yesterday.

Jesse:

My son, dost thou remember Samuel the prophet?

David:

Dimly, as in a dream;
But what—

Jesse:

He came one day, into our village yonder,
And all the people wondered what had brought him
To such an humble place. And as we wondered,
Fearing to ask him, lest he take offense,
He called me to his side. "Jesse," he said,

"How many sons hast thou?" I answered him,
And he did bid me bring my sons to him.
Still wondering, I did call my boys together.
The holy prophet looked upon them all,
And shook his head. "Hast thou no other son?"
He asked. Now, David, thou wert but a strip-
ling—

So tall. I told him thou wert with the sheep.
He bade me bring thee to him; when he saw thee
He lifted up his eyes unto the heavens,
And spake: "O Jesse, this thy youngest son
Shall be the anointed one of Israel!"
Thus speaking, he did lay his holy hands
Upon thy head, and blessed thee—and departed.

David:

What may this mean, my father?

Jesse: David, my son,

I only know that great tasks do await thee.

David:

Here, midst the sheep?

Jesse: David, I know not where;

But this I know—that when the hour is come
Thy heart will tell thee.

David: Great tasks come to them

Who seek them.

Jesse: Or to them who wait in patience!

David:

In patience, my father? How long shall I have
patience?

Jesse:

Do that which is appointed. All the rest
Is in the hands of God.

David: Men must prepare

For deeds of greatness. Is this my preparation?

Jesse:

Do that which is thy lot—and do it well;
And it may serve thee.

David:

'Tis true I have some skill upon the harp,
And thou hast often seen me cast a stone,
And strike a mark no larger than thy hand;
But these are things that any man may do.

Jesse:

My son, what man can wake such melodies
As thou canst waken from thy harp? What man
Dares face the wolf that preys upon his flock,
And, with a single stone within his sling,
Defy him? Thou darest do this, my son!

David:

How shall this serve me?

Jesse: Master thy discontent.

David:

Oh, would, my father, that I had thy faith,
That this my life is not a wasted thing!

Jesse:

Have faith! My son, perchance this is thy test;
To live through what to thee seem fruitless days,
To conquer thy despair, to be the master
Of thine own soul! To do thy daily task,
And wait in patience.

SCENE II

Announcer: The weeks pass and Jesse, David's father, hears that the armies of King Saul are encamped not many miles from the village. Anxious to learn the fate of his eldest son, Eliab, who is serving in the army, Jesse sends David to the camp. Taking with

him his harp and his faithful sling, David sets out early in the morning.

It is twilight when he reaches the camp. Round the fires are grouped the soldiers, laughing, jesting, or grumbling. David remains in the shadows beyond the campfires, and in a moment he hears the voice of his brother Eliab.

[*Laughter as scene begins.*]

Eliab: I said to Saul the king—

Soldier: Ye spake to the king, Eliab?

Eliab: That I did, and as boldly as I speak to ye here!

Soldier: Eliab, had I thy confidence I would be a king myself!

[*Laughter.*]

Eliab: Ye laugh? Well, my friends—not only did I speak to Saul, but he listened to me—

Soldier: Before long, Eliab, thou wilt be the commander of this army.

[*Laughter.*]

Eliab: Perchance I could command as well as some who are set over me! I'll tell ye something, my friends; there's no opportunity for me in this army!

Soldier: As much for thee as any man. But, come, Eliab! What else didst thou—tell the king?

[*Laughter.*]

Eliab: If ye mean but to jest with me—

Soldier: Nay! Nay! Who are we to jest with a great man!

Eliab: Some day, my friends, ye shall see! Huh, were it not that I had so many enemies, I might rise to the rank of commander!

Soldier: Enemies, Eliab! Surely thou art mistaken.

Eliab: Thou thinkest so, my friend?

Soldier: Aye, thou art too modest to have enemies. Come, Eliab; the last time thou camest before the king, what saidst thou?

Eliab: Well, I spoke to Saul, and I said—

[*Laughter.*]

Soldier: Nay, nay, my friends; laugh not. Eliab speaks so seldom, we must treasure his words! Continue, Eliab.

Eliab: Well, 'twas this morning. Saul called me to his tent. "My lord," said I, "Why art thou cast down?"

Soldier (laughing): 'Twas that he saw thee, Eliab. Ha! ha! "I said to the king, and the king said to me—"

Eliab (rising): Fools! [*Another Soldier enters.*]

Second Soldier: Eliab!

Eliab: Who calls me?

Second Soldier (points): There is a boy sitting yonder who says he is thy brother.

Eliab: What brings him here?

Second Soldier: I know not; but he would speak to thee. Hither, boy! [*DAVID enters.*]

Eliab: Well, David! Why art thou not home, minding thy sheep?

David: Eliab, my father sent me hither.

Eliab: Ha, ha! Art thou come to fight the Philistines, with thy sling?

David: My brother, I came to seek news of thee.

Eliab: Nay! I know thee, David! Thou art come here to—to loiter in the camp!

David: My brother, I came only to hear of thy deeds of greatness before Saul the king. [*Laughter.*]

Eliab: Well, get thee hence!

David: May I not tarry until morning?

Eliab: Get thee to my tent; this is no place for a lad like thee.

Soldier: Nay, Eliab—he hath a harp; let him stay and play for us.

Voices: Aye, lad. Play for us, lad (*etc.*).

David: Soldiers of Israel, I—I play a little, but only to while away the hours in the hills—

Soldier: Nay, play for us, lad!

David: It is your will, soldiers— [DAVID plays.]

Soldier: Lad, our thanks to thee. Thou hast carried us all far from the scenes of war.

Captain (distant): Who plays yonder?

Soldier: Lad, it is our captain; he hath heard thee!

David: I must begone; perchance he will be angry that I am come to the camp.

Soldier: Nay, fear not. Thy harp shall make thee welcome. [Enter CAPTAIN.]

Captain: Lad, was it thy music I heard?

Voice: Answer the captain, boy; he questions thee.

David: It—it was, my lord.

Captain: Thy name?

David: David, my lord—brother to Eliab.

Captain: David, thy music hath even now reached the ears of the king. He would have thee come and play for him.

David: I—I play for the king?

Captain: Aye, lad. At once.

David: Now, my lord—now?

Captain: Come, boy; the king awaits thee.

[Exit CAPTAIN and DAVID.]

Eliab: Well!

SCENE III

Announcer: The next scene is laid in the tent of King Saul; on his dais the king sits, alone. In a moment the tent curtain is pushed gently aside, and David and the captain enter. But the king does not see them in the semi-darkness, for he is given over to his own foreboding thoughts.

Captain: Lad—

David: Aye, my captain.

Captain: Wait here; when it is the king's pleasure he will speak to thee. Till then, silence. Farewell.

[*Exit* CAPTAIN.]

David: Farewell, my lord. (*A pause.*)

Saul (thinking himself alone):

My thoughts—my thoughts—would that I might
escape them!

It is an evil portent, here by night,
That I the king am given to despair;
Methinks I am pursued by evil fates:
Defeat, disaster are upon mine armies!
We are like men forsaken of our God;
For each day sees us stand in craven fear,
While Goliath, the Giant of the Philistines,
Comes forth upon the plain to mock my host.
Can I, the king, not find a worthy champion?
Shall Israel be conquered by—fear?

[*KING sees* DAVID.]

But hold—who stands yonder? Thy name!

David: David, sire.

Saul: David? What brings thee here—ah, art thou
he whose music I did hear?

David: Aye, my lord.

Saul: Come nearer, lad; be not afraid—almost I had
forgot that I had sent for thee. Thou art but a boy.
What brings thee here to this camp?

David: Sire, I came hither to seek my brother Eliab.

Saul: Eliab?

David: The one who gives thee counsel!

Saul: Eliab? I know him not—it matters not—come!
Canst thou find now a tune within thy harp? Play gently,
David, for I would banish all these thoughts of war.

David (nervous): My lord the king I—I—

Saul: Come, lad; play for me—forget that I am king.
(*David plays.*) My mind was overwrought, but thou hast brought it ease. Boy, didst thou hear my words, while I did think that I was alone?

David: Sire, I could not help but hear them.

Saul: Then thou must know how heavy is the heart of Saul, thy king. Come closer, boy. I am but a man, for all the crown I wear. Lad, I would give all this pomp—this circumstance of war, this crown—for thy youth and thine untroubled mind!

David: My lord, my mind is troubled, too.

Saul: Thine, David?

David: Aye, sire; for hath not my king given way to despair?

Saul: For reason—bitter reason!

David: My lord, forgive me if I speak too boldly—but give not way to thy despair!

Saul: David, art thou ignorant that my kingdom is menaced by mine enemies the Philistines? That the giant Goliath comes forth each day upon the plain to defy us—and that I can find no champion in all my host to go forth against him?

David: My lord, he can be conquered!

Saul: Brave words, lad—but vain. This giant is no mortal man, but a devil—and all the powers of darkness fight upon his side.

David: My lord, there is one who fights at thy right hand, against whom all the powers of darkness shall not prevail!

Saul: Who fights at my right hand?

David: The Lord God of Battles; the Lord God of Israel!

SCENE IV

Announcer: Thus spoke David the shepherd boy to King Saul, a voice of hope and courage in a chorus of despair; a voice speaking with a boldness incredible, yet true.

And now, on the following morning, we find the soldiers gathered together, listening to the jealous, discontented words of Eliab, David's brother.

Eliab: A king, ye say? What sort of king may this be that hides in his tent—and listens to the harp of my bother David? I ask you again, soldiers of Israel: Is this Saul worthy to be a leader? Shall we fight for such a king? Shall those who play upon the harp be placed over the men at arms? Huh! I say, let us return to our homes.

Soldier: Methinks Eliab speaks with wisdom. Look, Eliab, look yonder across the valley! Men stir in the camp of the Philistines. Banners are raised aloft. Perchance Goliath comes forth again! Perchance this day he will not stand and challenge us merely, but will advance and smite us!

Eliab: Let Saul go forth against him! If he be king, let him fight his own battle.

Soldier: Aye! Not send *us* out to die!

[*Enter DAVID.*]

David: Eliab!

Eliab: How now, David! Art thou still here? Did I not tell thee to return home?

David: I am not beholden to thee, my brother!

Eliab: Guard thy words, boy! Art thou puffed up, that thou hast played for the king? Dost thou set thyself over me?

David: Eliab, I am not come here to quarrel with thee.

Eliab: Well! Wherefore art thou come here!

David: To serve my king, not to betray him.

Eliab: Hence, or I shall—

David: Hold thy hand. I heard thy words, Eliab, thy mutinous words.

Eliab: Ha, ha, ha! Perchance, David, thou art come here to fight the giant—thou and thy sling and thy bag of pebbles! Ha, ha, ha! [*Laughter. A trumpet.*]

Voice (mob voice): Hold, Eliab! The king cometh forth!

Voices: The king! The king! [*Enter SAUL, followed by CAPTAIN and body-guard.*]

Saul: Soldiers of Israel: I, your king, come forth once more to place the safety of Israel within your hands; may it not be in vain that I still have faith in thee! (*Mutterings.*) Ye mutter, and turn away. I wonder not, for despair hath struck us all. And yet shall we be conquered by despair? Shall we let Israel fall before the hands of the Philistines, because there is no man among us who will go forth against Goliath?

Voice (mob voice): Go forth to certain death, Saul?

Saul: Well, shall we be slaves instead? Ye speak of certain death, but perchance this giant can be conquered.

Voices: Nay, nay!

Saul: I thought even as ye do, but last night there came to me a boy, a shepherd lad, unused to war and arms—but had ye half his faith and courage, O men of Israel, ye would be victorious! For he spoke unto me one thing which we have all forgotten: That though the powers of evil fight against us we have on great ally.

Captain: What ally, O king?

Saul: The Lord God of Hosts, O captain. (*Trumpet.*) Listen, O men of Israel: The trumpet sounds in the camp of the Philistines; Goliath comes forth again—

who goes out against him? (*Pause.*) Will not a man among you be the champion of Israel?

Captain (pointing): Look upon the giant, O king—where he advances! What flesh and blood can stand against him?

Saul: Soldiers! Let any man go forth, and I will bestow upon him half the riches of my kingdom!

David: O Saul!

Saul: Who speaks?

Eliab: David, hold thy tongue!

Saul: Nay! Let him speak!

David: O king, I wish not thy reward, but let me go forth against Goliath—

Eliab: Saul, this lad, my brother, is mad to speak thus. Be still—be still, David!

David: Nay! I will be heard!

Saul: David, thou art but a boy. And this giant is a mighty man at arms. Look upon him, where he advances. He would break thee—like a stick!

David: Nay, Saul! Let me try my strength against him.

Saul: Why, boy, thy strength is as nothing!

David: Last night, O Saul, thou didst listen to my words; hear me now; let me be thy champion!

Saul: This giant will surely kill thee.

David: He is but a man—and he can be conquered!

Saul: Hear this, my men at arms! Harken to this boy! Does he not shame you? Here! Look upon this sword! Who among ye dares to take this sword—dares wield it against yon giant? To him goes half my kingdom!

David: Saul, I tell thee I ask no reward, nor wish I thy sword, since I am unproved in arms; but let me go forth against Goliath with my sling—

Eliab: Thy sling! [Laughter.]

David: Ah! Thou mockest me, my brother; 'tis true I am but a shepherd.

Eliab: A shepherd boy to fight the great Goliath! [Laughter.]

David: 'Tis true I am no man at arms, but at least I dare to go out against him!

Eliab: David, my brother, thou art beside thyself! Shall I return to thy father bearing news that I let thee be slain?

David: My brother, I have faced peril ere now.

Saul: Peril? What peril like to this, lad?

David: O king: When there came a lion, and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after him, and delivered the lamb out of his mouth. And when he rose up against me, I seized him and slew him—

Saul: David, this giant is greater than any lion!

David: I have some cunning with this sling; and this giant shall be as the lion that attacked my father's flock.

Saul: David! Thou speakest like one filled with the voice of prophecy! And yet I fear for thee.

David: Saul, I have waited for this hour. It has come. Let me go forth against Goliath!

Saul: To thy death?

David: The Lord that delivered me out of the jaws of the lion, He will deliver me out of the hands of Goliath! For I fight not alone, O king—the Lord God of Battles fights at my right hand. [Trumpet.]

Captain: Saul! What answer dost thou make to the challenging trumpet of Goliath?

Saul: Let my trumpet sound. Israel hath found a champion! (*Trumpet near.*) Go forth, David—for surely thou art filled with the fire of God!

David: Saul, ere I go, this word bear to my father,

should I return not: That I did heed his counsel, and that when my hour came, I met it—as he would have me. Farewell. [Exit DAVID.]

Saul: Look, captain! Where he stoops and finds him a smooth stone. Is that all the weapon he bears to battle?

Captain: My lord, 'tis certain death for the lad! Almost I cannot look upon it.

Saul: I do repent me that I sent him forth! 'Twas more to shame my men than anything—

Captain: Look, my lord! He doth advance most bravely.

Saul: Ah, brave youth, to sacrifice thee so heedlessly! I cannot look upon it. [Noise.]

Saul: What is that roar?

Captain: The enemy have seen our champion—and shout in derision. Ah! Now the lad stops.

Saul: Perchance he will flee in fear.

Captain: Nay, Saul! He speaks. I cannot hear all the words, but there is defiance in them—

Saul: I tell thee, the boy is touched with madness!

Captain: Look, my lord! The giant doth advance upon him.

Saul: Surely David will flee!

Captain: Nay, Saul, he stands his ground. My lord—

Saul: Aye?

Captain: The lad hath placed the stone within his sling—

Saul: A stone cannot pierce the giant's armour, captain!

Captain: Nay, my lord; it cannot; save it strike one place full on the forehead, so small no archer could strike it with an arrow.

Saul: Hath—David launched his stone?

Captain: Nay, my lord; he stands with deadly coolness, as though to take a certain aim. Ah, he throws—
[*Yells, off-stage.*]

Saul: The giant hath struck him?

Captain: Nay! The giant falls!

Saul: Goliath falls?

Captain: He lies upon the ground. (*Yells.*) His armour-bearer's fled! David advances, sire—advances!
[*Yells.*]

Saul: A miracle!

Captain: Nay, sire! No miracle. The lad is master of the sling, and placed his stone with such a deadly aim it struck the giant full upon the forehead! Look, my lord—look! David advances upon the giant and with his own sword—ah!
[*Cries of AH!*]

Saul: Goliath's head he holds aloft! Look upon it, O men of Israel! There lies thine enemy—conquered by one who would not be conquered by despair.

SACRIFICE

CHARACTERS: ABRAHAM SARAH, his wife
 ISAAC, their son

SCENES: 1. IN THE TENT OF ABRAHAM. NIGHT
 2. OUTSIDE ABRAHAM'S TENT
 3. IN THE TENT OF ISAAC
 4. THE LAND OF MORIAH. SOME DAYS LATER.
 5. IN ISAAC'S TENT

SCENE I

Announcer: Now, these are the words of the book of Genesis, the twenty-second chapter: "And it came to pass that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him: Abraham, and he said, Behold, I am here. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. . . ."

Let us begin our scene a few hours after this command has come to Abraham. Let us imagine a tent in the desert; a man sitting by a rough table. Across from him, a woman. They do not speak. She watches him, as though wondering at his silence; and he, seeing her eyes upon him, turns away, and stares into the darkness outside. [*Curtain rises on the above scene.*]

Sarah: Why are you silent? Is there not silence enough out yonder in the darkness? Speak to me,

Abraham—break this spell! Have you no voice?
Abraham!

Abraham: What would you have me say?

Sarah: To say anything is better than to sit there
staring. Why do you stare into the darkness?

Abraham: I do but sit here quietly, Sarah.

Sarah: Quietly; quietly, yes! Abraham—

Abraham: Yes?

Sarah: Why did you start, and turn, and stare again?

Abraham: I did not know.

Sarah: Why your eyes—there is a terror in them!
Look at me—look now. You cannot? Why? Why do
you turn away again?

Abraham: O Sarah—

Sarah: Well?

Abraham: Nothing, nothing.

Sarah: There—you are hiding it! What has come
over you?

Abraham:

Perchance I'm tired. Do not give import
To every passing mood, to every fancy,
To every little cloud of melancholy,
That, like the cloud-born vapours of the dawn,
Are swept away by the strong morning wind,
And heaven is clear again.

Sarah:

You hide with words what lies within your heart.

Abraham:

Nay—

Sarah:

Yes, you do. Why, you cannot thus deceive me.
There is a bond that binds thy heart and mine;
And that which thou wouldst keep unto thyself—
This thing that troubles thee—it doth

Reach out and stabs at me as well.

Come, tell me—canst thou not? Is it so—

Abraham:

It is nothing.

Sarah:

Then let it be forgotten. Dear, my husband,

What evil threatens us? And our dear son,

Is he not safe? Nay, let us speak of him!

How he doth wax with every passing day

More strong, and lithe as cedar in the wind!

And his eye clear, and laughter in his voice!

Oh, he is all of thee, and all of me.

O dear, my love, if harm should e'er befall him!

Sometimes at night I dream that he's in danger;

And, waking then with terror in my heart,

I tiptoe to his bed, and peep at him,

And put my hand upon his forehead—so—

[*SARAH indicates the movement of a woman
caressing a child.*]

To know that he is safe.

Abraham:

Well, he is safe—

He is safe!

Sarah:

Why do you say it thus—with shaken voice?

What do you know, that you hold back from me?

Tell me; it is my right.

Abraham:

What should I tell, when I know nothing myself?

Sarah:

Abraham, there is some danger you hide!

Abraham:

No, no, no!

Sarah:

I know there is.

Abraham:

Life is itself a danger,

And death the only surety we know. [*He rises.*]

Sarah:

You speak of death? God save us, Abraham!

Why have you risen? Why do you turn from me?

Why, there is madness in your eyes! And horror!

Abraham! Speak to me—speak to me—Abraham!

Speak to me—

[*She follows him to the door of the tent.*]

Abraham:

I cannot—I cannot!

Sarah (pointing):

Abraham—look—look behind that curtain.

Our son is there. He sleeps. He is safe. He is well.

Come, look at him with me, and cast this fear—

Whate'er it be—far, far from out your heart.

[*She tries to lead him to the curtain, but he does not move.*]

Abraham (brokenly):

I—am not—well to-night. If I speak—strangely,

Observe me not—but leave me—to myself—

To myself—

Sarah:

Abraham—

Abraham:

Good-night. Good-night. God help us—

God protect us. God have mercy on us!

[*ABRAHAM exit.*]

Sarah (in wonderment):

God have mercy on us? God protect us? What is this danger?

What is this thing that doth torment his heart,
And yet can find no utterance? I fear it—
I fear it! (*She falls on her knees.*) O dear Lord
God, protect us with Thy love;
Protect my son with Thy wide sheltering wings
And keep him safe from harm. Amen. Amen.

SCENE II

Announcer: Outside the tent, in the night, in the silence, roamed Abraham, a man torn by the conflict in his heart: his duty to the command of God, and the love he bore his son. He tried to pray, to find comfort and strength. Above him loomed the hills, and the open sky, in which shone a single star—and there, upon the bleak hillside, Abraham lifted his voice to his God.

[*ABRAHAM kneels in prayer. The light is dim.*]

Abraham:

O God, hear me and, hearing, give answer unto me!
Give me to understand! Show me Thy purpose!
But, above all, tell me—tell me, O God,
That Thy command to offer up my son,
My only son, my flesh and my blood,
Is false! Tell me it was a mad delusion!
Tell me it was some vapour of my brain!
No true command of Thine!
Tell me 'tis false! It is a thought of hell,
Not heaven! And the devil, not God, the prompter!
Why, it is folly—even the thought is folly.
Why should I be singled out for torture?
What have I done?
Would God come to me—to me among all men—
And have me slay my son? My only son?
(And slay his mother's heart?)

Nay! 'Tis a nightmare, and a thing of darkness;
To be forgotten, to be laughed at,
Like the fears that come with midnight,
Like the cloud-born vapours of the dawn,
Like the mists on the hills
That the strong wind of morning sweeps away,
And heaven is clear again!
O heaven, be clear again for me!
Sun, shine for me again!
Oh, let this darkness in my heart,
This all encompassing night,
This pit, this shadow, this horror—

[*With rising voice.*]

Save me from this, O Lord!
Come, thou my soul, be firm!
Come, thou my heart, be bold!
Renounce such a command—
Aye, cast it from thee!

Cast it—

[*His voice breaks.*]

Words—words—to turn me from my purpose!
Nay, the command is there—in my heart—
Immovable, real, like those mountains—
Like this soil beneath my feet.

Who am I to question the purpose of my God?

[*With a cry of agony.*]

O my son, my son!

Come, thou my heart—be bold; cast feeling from
thee.

Cast out all love, all mercy, all compassion!

Be thou the stern, bold instrument of God.

O my wife, my wife! I cannot tell thee—

I can never tell thee!

This pain I must bear alone. [*Then, more quietly.*]

Come my heart—come to thy breaking!

Come my soul—to thy torture—to thy torture.
God's will be done.

SCENE III

Announcer: And so Abraham goes to the tent where sleeps his son, Isaac; and goes to his bedside where the boy sleeps, and looks at him.

[*The curtain rises on ISAAC asleep on a pallet in his tent. ABRAHAM enters.*]

Abraham (whispering):

How quietly he sleeps. God strengthen me. God help me.

My son, my only son.

And his mother yonder, unaware of danger.

Yet I must wake him. Isaac—Isaac—

[*Rouses ISAAC.*]

Isaac (waking):

What? What—Oh—Oh— I—I—

Abraham:

Come, rouse thyself. We have a journey to make.

Isaac:

Now? By night?

Abraham:

Yes. Come. Wake not thy mother.

Isaac:

Does she not go with us?

Abraham:

No. We go alone.

Isaac:

I did not know you meant to take a journey.

You did not speak of it this evening, father.

Abraham:

I was not sure that I should make it then.

Isaac:

Well! I'll not lie here if you would have me go.
I'll strap my sandals on. (*ISAAC fastens his sandals.*) There—shall we be gone long?

Abraham:

I—I think we shall be gone—yes, for some time,
my son.

Isaac:

Then I must see my mother. I must bid her
farewell,
Until we do return safely.

Abraham:

Wake her not. She's tired, and she sleeps.

Isaac:

'Tis a strange journey, this! By dead of night!
Such secrecy! 'Tis not like thee, good father.

Abraham:

Well, get thee ready.

Isaac:

Where do we go?

Abraham:

Into the hills. Into the land of Moriah.

Isaac:

This is a journey! Well, I'll take thy orders.
And question not. I trust thee, good my father.

Abraham (to himself):

Yes, we must trust—we must trust Our Father!

Isaac:

Well, I am ready. This is sport, this journey!
You've always told me that I am too young,
To venture with thee far into the hills.
But now, forsooth, perchance I am a man!
When I return—

Abraham (brokenly):

Isaac, let us go.

Isaac:

Why, father, what's the matter?

There are tears in thine eyes.

Abraham (firmer):

No, no! Come! We must go.

Isaac:

Art thou not well?

Abraham: Yes, yes!

I do not think you are. You seem—unlike yourself!

Why do you stare at me, and hold my arm?

Why—

Abraham (taking ISAAC's hands):

Isaac, my son, I love you. You know that?

Isaac:

So well I never even think of it.

Abraham:

Never forget it. Never doubt it, son!

Isaac:

I trust you—I love you. Why should I doubt you?

What reason?

Abraham:

No matter where we go, or what we do,

No matter what danger threatens, you will trust me?

Isaac:

Beyond life, beyond death, will I trust you;

Even as you have told me to trust my God;

To obey unquestioning, to the last command.

Abraham:

Come here, come close to me. Let me hold thee—

[*Holds ISAAC in his arms.*]

There— God have mercy on us both.

[*SARAH enters.*]

Sarah:

Why, Abraham! Isaac!

Abraham:

Alas! Thy mother comes.

Isaac:

Why "alas," father?

Abraham:

Nay, lad—

Sarah: Abraham, why have you roused the boy? He was sleeping soundly. Isaac, why you are dressed, and your sandals are on your feet! What may this mean?

Isaac: We go on a journey, mother.

Sarah: A journey? Now? Abraham—

Abraham: The boy has told the truth.

Sarah: But—why a journey starting thus by night? Why this secrecy? Could you not tell me?

Abraham: I did not want to wake thee, Sarah.

Sarah: Well! 'Tis strange. There is some meaning in this. What is it?

Abraham: 'Tis—'tis nothing.

Sarah (provoked): Isaac, return to thy bed. This journey with thy father can wait.

Isaac: But, mother, I want to go!

Sarah (sharp): Get thee to bed. I say, this journey can wait.

Abraham: Sarah, this journey cannot wait. We must leave now.

Sarah: You must tell me wherefore you go thus by night!

Abraham: I go—to—sacrifice in the land of Moriah.

Sarah: Why take our son? You have never done so.

Abraham: I would have him with me.

Sarah: Then let me go, too.

Abraham: No.

Sarah: It is too far for him—the road too steep.

Isaac (eagerly): No, it's not, Mother! No, it's not too steep!

Sarah: Get thee to bed, Isaac—get thee to bed at once!

Abraham: Sarah, give him no command. He must go with me.

Sarah: He may come to some harm! I fear he will!

Isaac: But, don't you trust my father? Well, *I* trust him! Why we'll be back within a day or two; won't we, father? [Pause.]

Sarah: Abraham, why don't you answer him? Why don't you speak? Abraham!

Abraham (picking up his bundle):

Come, Isaac, come! We must be gone at once.

Sarah:

His safety on thy head, O Abraham!

Swear thou no danger will befall him yonder!

Ease thou my heart—swear he'll be safe with thee!

Abraham:

I—

Sarah:

You cannot tell me that? O God—

God help us. Then what is the matter?

Isaac:

O mother! Do not worry! Why, 'tis nothing!

A little journey and a safe return. That's all.

Sarah:

Is that—all, Abraham? Tell me it is!

Abraham:

We—we are in the hands of God. Save in them,
Where can any man look for safety?

Sarah:

And yet—I fear—I fear—

It sweeps around me, though I fight against it!

Oh, comfort me—tell me that all is well!

Abraham:

I say that all is in the hands of God.

Come, Isaac—bid thy mother farewell.

[*He holds back curtain of tent, waiting for ISAAC.*]

Isaac:

Good-night, mother—good-night, my little mother.

[*ISAAC embraces SARAH. She clings to him.*]

Sarah (to ABRAHAM):

Bring him back safely, Abraham! Bring him back
to me safely!

Isaac (going towards door):

Good-bye, mother—good-bye!

Sarah:

Good-bye—good-bye—

[*ABRAHAM and ISAAC exit.*]

Be still, my heart! Be still, my fears!

God watches over all. All shall be well.

SCENE IV

Announcer: “And Abraham rose early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac, his son, and clave the wood for a burnt offering and rose up and went unto the place of which God had told him.

“Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off.

“And Abraham said unto the young men, Abide ye here . . . and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.”

[*Curtain rises on empty stage—to indicate mountain-top. ABRAHAM enters, followed by ISAAC.*]

Abraham:

This is the place, my son. Set down thy burden.

Isaac (setting down his bundle):

Ah! 'Twas heavy that last sharp rise—I felt it!

And yet I've shown thee that I can travel

As well as any man; and thou wilt take me

Again, my father, when thou com'st to worship!

Abraham (muttering):

Yes, yes.

Isaac (pointing down to one side):

Father! Look yonder—see the valley.

How brightly doth the river catch the sun,

How fresh, how green the world! See where yon
bird

Above us swoops and soars and dives again!

Oh, he, too, feels the joy of life—the power—

Oh, how good is life this morning!

Abraham:

Isaac, give me that stone, for to build me an altar.

Isaac (picking up stone):

This one? Nay, let me help thee lift it—

[*Helps ABRAHAM.*]

And this one, too?

Abraham: Aye. That one, too.

[*ISAAC picks up another stone and ABRAHAM
begins to build a rude altar.*]

Isaac:

Why, thy hand is trembling. Are thou tired,
father?

Abraham (building altar):

Nay, nay.

Isaac:

Oh, there is time to build this altar later.
Look now—the morning mist hath risen yonder—
See how the jagged peaks loom to the sun!
How sheer it drops upon this other side!
See thou our tent—nay, yonder. Follow my
hand— [Points.]

It is a tiny little patch of white—
Why, father, thou art not looking?

Abraham:

Give me another stone.

Isaac:

Methinks this is a mighty sacrifice
To build us such an altar! Here's thy stone.
[Gives ABRAHAM another stone.]

Abraham:

Yes, a sacrifice! A mighty sacrifice!

Isaac: Well, the altar is laid; and behold the fire
and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt
offering?

Abraham: "God will provide himself the lamb, my
son."

Isaac:

Well! 'Tis a strange sacrifice—to come so far
And not to bring the lamb that shall be offered!
And yet I fear my heart dwells not on that,
But rather on the beauty of the dawn.
Would that my mother were here to see it, too!
We'll bring her here to this very place, some day,
That she may see what we have seen this morning.
And if she falters where the slope is steep,
Why, then my hand shall help her.

Abraham:

Isaac—son—

Isaac:

Yes?

Abraham:

Speak not of thy mother now, I do beseech thee!
(Torture—oh, torture!) Stretch forth thy hands
to me.

Isaac (wondering, but obedient): My hands? Why,
yes—why?

Abraham: So. Now—hold them still—

[*Picks up cord and begins to bind ISAAC'S hands.*]

Isaac: Father, what is that cord? Why, you're binding my hands!

Abraham: Yes.

Isaac: Close to my body. Why, I can't move. What—

Abraham (to himself): God give me strength—give me strength—

Isaac: I don't understand—

Abraham: Isaac, look not at me!

Isaac: What may this mean, father—binding me thus before this altar? (*Laughs.*) Like a lamb for the offering!

Abraham: Look at me not!

Isaac: Father, your eyes are full of madness! Tell me, this binding me is a prank, a jest, a—(*begins to be frightened*). Let me go, father! Unloose my hands, unloose me!

Abraham: Isaac, close thine eyes.

[*ABRAHAM draws out knife.*]

Isaac: No!

Abraham: I beg of thee—

Isaac: Father, why is that knife in thy hand?

Abraham: Close thine eyes!

Isaac: If this be a jest to test my courage, well, thou hast tested it. Now let me go.

Abraham: Kneel.

Isaac: Well, I will play the jest as well as thou! I'll kneel. Ha! [*He kneels.*]

Abraham: Look on the ground.

Isaac (kneeling on ground): Well, I have obeyed. But why?

Abraham: O my son, my son, how utterly dost thou trust me! How fearlessly thou doest my command! *That* breaks my heart—*that* takes the strength from my hand— Oh, I cannot—I cannot!

Isaac: Father, what means that knife upraised above me!

Abraham: O Isaac, thou art the sacrifice!

Isaac: I—the sacrifice? You mean to kill me!

Abraham: Close thine eyes.

Isaac: You mean it not, I know you mean it not. I trust you; look, I close my eyes. You would not harm me. You could not.

Abraham: O God, 'tis Thou must move this arm—for I am powerless! O God—O cruel God! O merciless one! A God who cries for blood! Is this the zeal that Thou demandest? Let me kill myself—let me be the sacrifice; let me be the lamb upon the altar! But spare Thou my son.

Isaac: Father! You cry out like one possessed of evil spirits. I fear thee, father—I fear thee!

Abraham: O weakness, begone! Have faith, O my heart, have faith; even as my son hath faith in me, so let me have faith in Thee, O Lord God. Isaac, close thine eyes.

Isaac: Oh, father—father! If this thing be commanded of God, then is He a God of cruelty.

Abraham: O my Heavenly Father, strengthen me!

Isaac: A merciless God! A God of blood and pain!

Abraham: This is the last, supremest sacrifice. O God, take Thou my son— [*He raises the knife.*]

[*There comes a chord of music, swelling to the full notes of the organ, a symbol of the Voice of God.*]

Isaac: Father, what is that music? Is this death? Then it is beautiful.

Abraham: Listen! A voice—

Isaac: I hear it not.

Abraham: Then is it whispering to my heart.

Isaac: Nay, there are voices coming on the wind.

Abraham: "Mercy," they seem to say. "Have mercy. Lay not thy hand upon the lad, for now I knoweth thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son—thy only son—from me." [*Curtain.*]

SCENE V

Announcer: And Isaac followed his father into the valley. Now, the night of their return, Isaac sat on his bed, thinking. He had greeted his mother a few moments before, but had said nothing. Soon he heard her footsteps approaching the tent; and he felt a dread of the meeting; he feared that she would question him; nor did he mean to answer her questions. He rose to greet her. [*SARAH enters the tent.*]

Isaac:

Yes, mother?

Sarah:

Why, son, I scarce have seen thee, since thy return.

Isaac:

I was tired; I came straightway to rest.

Sarah:

Look at me, Isaac. How serious thy face!

Isaac:

Serious? O no; tired, perchance.

Sarah:

Nay, there is something in thy face, dear son.

I sent thee forth a boy, but now a man

Returns. What hast thou seen to do this?

To change thee in five days, so utterly?

Isaac:

Oh, I have seen the clouds, and the jagged hills,

And— Come, come, mother! 'Tis nothing,
nothing!

There! Talk of other things.

Sarah:

Nay, dear my son, upon that mountain yonder

Came something to thy heart—I know not what.

Isaac:

Yes, mother, something did come to my heart.

Sarah:

Well? What is it?

Isaac: A new God.

Sarah:

A new God! Hush—such blasphemy!

Shhh! Cast it from thy mind!

Isaac: I cannot. Mother, what manner of God dost
thou worship?

Sarah: The God of our fathers. There is no other God.

Isaac: Yes, yes, there is! Another God greater, more
wonderful, more everlasting!

Sarah: Here comes thy father; speak not so wildly,
lest he punish thee.

Isaac: He will not punish me! That much I know.

Sarah: Nay, speak not thy thoughts to him.

Isaac: Nay, to him I must speak, and he will under-
stand. Father! [ABRAHAM enters.]

Abraham: Well, Isaac?

Isaac: I ask one question, and you will understand.

Abraham: Well?

Isaac: What manner of God have you? Tell me, that my mother may know Him, too.

Sarah (trying to stop him): Isaac—

Abraham: Nay, let him speak.

Isaac: Is your God a cruel God, insatiable, crying out for blood?

Sarah: Isaac!

Isaac: Nay, he must answer me! It is my right! I earned that right upon the mountain! Ask him if I did not!

Abraham: He did. I will answer him.

Sarah: Nay, Abraham, I have answered him already: that our God is the God of our fathers, and there is no other God!

Abraham: But there is.

Sarah (startled): Abraham!

Abraham: A God I never knew before; a God who came to me upon the mountain.

Sarah: A God you never knew?

Abraham: The God of Mercy. The God of Love.

ISHMAEL

CHARACTERS: ABRAHAM	HAGAR
SARAH, his wife	SHEPHERD
ISHMAEL	ANGEL

SCENES: 1. THE TENT OF ABRAHAM. EVENING
 2. THE TENT OF SARAH. EVENING. SOME
 DAYS LATER
 3. THE TENT OF HAGAR. EVENING. A YEAR
 LATER
 4. OUTSIDE THE TENT OF ABRAHAM. FIFTEEN
 YEARS LATER
 5. THE DESERT

SCENE I

Announcer: Imagine a primitive people, nomads, pitching their tents wheresoever night found them, and at the dawn moving on, ever restless, over plain and mountain, following their flocks. Such was the tribe of Abraham. Like all primitive people, they depended on the wisdom and leadership of one strong man; and for many years Abraham had led them wisely. But as he reached the ripe years of his life, at a time when he saw his nomadic tribe ready to assume the greater task of a settled nation, at this time the heart of Abraham felt the beginning of a great sorrow, a sorrow that never left him, but grew and grew until it obscured all else on earth, became an obsession and a secret fear. And yet this sorrow he hid from the eyes of all his people, and particularly from his wife, Sarah.

Now, one night, when the long day's journey was over, and the flocks were tethered; when tired men sought the refuge of sleep, and the benediction of the night had fallen over this wandering tribe of the desert, Sarah, the wife of Abraham, came to his tent and found him alone, musing in the semi-darkness, with only a feeble taper throwing ghostly shadows on the walls.

Sarah:

What is thy sorrow? Tell me, for I would share it.

Abraham:

Naught but a passing mood that hath possessed me
With some strange discontent. 'Twill soon be gone.

Sarah:

Nay. I have seen thee altered, these many weeks,
As though some anguish gnawed within thy heart
But could not find its utterance. Tell me now
And, telling, ease thy troubled heart the while.
I am thy wife; who else can share thy secrets
Save me? Tell me.

Abraham: There's naught to tell thee, Sarah.

Sarah:

Nay, there is much to tell if thou *wilt* tell.
Have I not seen the change that hath possessed
thee?

Can I not hear thy voice—so cold and distant!
And thy dear eyes, that once shone forth with love,
Now scarce will look upon my face—do turn
Whene'er I enter, as though they feared to show me
How cold thy love hath grown.

Abraham: Reproach me not.

Sarah:

O Abraham, my husband, have we drifted
Like frail, tide-driven barks in desperate seas

Far, far apart; or seen our dear love fade,
And, like the fire that once illumined our hearth,
Burned down to cold, dead ashes?

Abraham:

Sarah! Art come to torture me
With fears unfounded, accusations vain?
Have I forsaken thee, or turned my love
To any woman save thee, and thee alone?

Sarah:

None, none save me—a barren, childless woman!

Abraham:

Sarah!

Sarah: 'Tis true. 'Tis written in thy heart!

I'd blame thee not for casting me aside.
I am thy sorrow, I who have borne no son
To stand before thee in his young fierce pride,
To follow in thy steps and bear thy name,
Complete thy work and lead thy people onward.
I am a stricken woman!

Abraham: Nay, cease thine anguish.

Sarah:

And I, who love thee even before my God,
I, who an hundred times would give my life
For thee, must be the cause of this thy sorrow!
God pity me! God pity me!

Abraham: Sarah!

Sarah:

Nay, thou wilt hate me; it will grow upon thee!
Try as thou wilt, thou canst not hold it back!
'Twill grow, 'twill overcome thee—and I'll not
blame thee!

Abraham:

Sarah, what madness!

Sarah: I can read my fate!

Thou, constant, loyal as ever, but hating me.
And pitying me—and pitying thyself!
Have I not read it aright? Oh, speak the truth!

Abraham:

Leave me, Sarah! Thy words are fraught with
madness.

Sarah:

Not madness, but truth, truth, truth!

[*Exit SARAH.*]

Abraham:

The truth, alas! And would it were not so.
God pity her! God pity me! The truth!

SCENE II

Announcer: Now, lest the listener forget the social structure of the people of Israel in the Patriarchal age, let him remember that polygamy—marriage to more than one woman—was an accepted and honourable custom. Let him further remember that tribal leadership passed ordinarily from father to son; and, therefore, the childless leader Abraham was confronted with not only a personal, but also a tribal misfortune.

Now, as the days passed, Sarah saw her husband overcome with what was at that time, and to that man, a great personal tragedy. And, the innocent cause of his unhappiness, she, too, mourned. Alone in her tent, by the dim light of the dying tapers, she prayed to her God. Lost in her meditation, she did not hear a gentle footstep without, nor the tent flap opening, nor a voice calling gently.

Hagar:

Sarah, mistress! My mistress! [*Enter HAGAR.*]

Sarah: Oh, Hagar; my handmaid.
Maiden, what brings thee here to see me?
Why thou art garbed as though to make a journey,
And thy comely face, elsewhere so blithe and gay,
Hath, for the moment, caught my melancholy;
Maiden, tell me, is't aught that troubles *thee*?

Hagar:
Much, dear mistress, whereof I cannot tell thee.

Sarah (not taking her too seriously):
Why, maid, there's naught that thou shouldst hide
from me.
Come, I will listen with attentive ear,
And I'll not chide thee; tell me all thy woes,
And, giving comfort, I'll forget mine own.
Tell me, dear Hagar.

Hagar: Nay, I cannot tell thee.

Sarah:
But thou art—going? Leaving me?

Hagar: Mistress, I leave to-night.

Sarah:
For where?

Hagar: Madam, for Egypt, whence I came.

Sarah:
Egypt, Hagar! Nay, these be jesting words.

Hagar:
They be most serious, madam. I leave to-night.

Sarah: But surely for some reason?

Hagar: Aye. Good reason.

Sarah:
Art thou unhappy, Hagar?

Hagar: Happy—and not happy, madam.

Sarah:
Thou speakest in riddles, maiden. What is thy
meaning?

Hagar:

I am in love, madam—too deeply so.

Sarah:

And thou fleest to Egypt because thou art in love?

Come, Hagar! Maidens do not flee from love.

Hagar:

Alas, my lady, I must flee from mine.

Sarah:

Ah, Hagar, I see—thy love is not returned!

And so to ease thy pain—yet that's not so,

For even now thou toldst me thou wert happy!

I understand it not; it is a riddle

Whereof I have no answer. Tell me all.

Hagar:

I—nay, mistress—thy blessing, and let me go.

Sarah:

Tell me, this love of thine; and do I know him?

Hagar:

Aye, mistress. Thou dost know him.

Sarah: And he loves thee?

Hagar:

I fear—I fear he doth.

Sarah: And wherefore fear?

Hagar:

Nay, question me not, I beg thee. Let me go.

Sarah (still lightly):

Wait! Hagar. His name—come, thou must tell me.

Hagar:

My lady, thou wilt be angry—but I could not—

Sarah:

His name!

Hagar: If I stay thou wilt beat me!

Sarah:

Why dost thou shrink from me!

Hagar:

Because I fear thee, mistress. I fear thine anger.

Sarah:

I charge thee, tell me, wherefore thou art afraid!

Hagar:

Sarah, my mistress, thy husband—

Sarah: My husband!

Hagar:

I love him!

Nay, I will say it now! I cannot help it.

I love him—I— Forgive me—and he loves me!

He hath not spoken, but I know it, my lady.

For every glance he gives me tells his love;

And should I stay—

Sarah: Wait, Hagar.

Hagar: Thou—thou art angry?

Sarah:

Fear not, maiden; I am not angry with thee.

Tell me, upon thy life, dost love him surely?

'Tis not his riches? Nor the name he bears?

Hagar:

Were he a humble shepherd in the field,

I'd love him then—even as I love now.

Sarah:

Hagar, a pact—a pact with thee!

Hagar: My lady?

Sarah:

Take him—to husband. Bear him a son; but this:

This remember, and pledge thy word to me,

Never to break, so help thee thy steadfast God.

Hagar:

Speak, Sarah.

Sarah: O woman young and comely and fertile—

Like a tree, like a flower and a bud on which no
blight hath fallen!

Take thou this man for thine own, take thou the strength of his limbs!

Give thyself utterly to him as the wave is lost in the tide.

But this remember, O maiden, though thou art the mate of his body;

Though thine be the bearing and the pain, and the pride of a child at thy breast;

Mine is the place of honour at the hearth of him I have cherished;

Mine is this child that thou bearest—

Hagar: Thine?

Sarah: To be loved as mine own.

Hagar:

Surely I would let thee love him.

Sarah: Love him and raise him to manhood!

Hagar:

Thy bargain is hard, O mistress—

Sarah: Come! Wilt thou pledge me thy word?

All that I have required: and this, nay greater than all:

Never to turn my husband against me by treacherous words—

Never to seek to part us—though thou hast a place in his dwelling?

Swear this, Hagar! Swear it—

Hagar: I—I swear.

SCENE III

Announcer: And thus it came to pass that “Sarah, Abraham’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid, . . . and gave her unto Abraham, her husband, to be his wife. . . . And the angel of the Lord appeared

unto Hagar [and said] unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son " (Genesis 16).

The next scene is laid some time later in the camp of Abraham. Hagar is alone in her tent, singing to the infant that lies in her shielding arms.

Song (Hagar):

Rest thee now, my little one,
Rest thee, for the day is done—
Hmmmmm, hmmmmm. (*Humming.*)
Rest thee, my babe.

On the cradle of my breast
I shall lull thee to thy rest.
Hmmmmm, hmmmmm.
Sleep thou, my babe.

Hagar:

Little one, like a flower folded at night,
Sleep, tiny one; my love is watching o'er thee.
Oh, to what destiny shalt thou be called?
Thou helpless one, shalt thou be mighty of arm?
Shalt thou— Nay, but he stirs—I'll say no more.
Sleep, little one. There, sleep now, my babe.

Abraham:

Hagar.

Hagar: Who comes?

[*ABRAHAM enters.*]

Abraham: 'Tis I.

Hagar: Abraham.

Abraham:

The babe?

Hagar: He sleeps. (*HAGAR puts babe in cradle.*)

Look! How like thine his mouth—

See! The brow—thine own, thy very own.

Abraham:

My little son! My son!

Hagar: Shhh! Thou hast waked him!

Abraham:

Oh, scarce can I believe that I've a son
To bear my name, and follow in my footsteps—
Take him not hence.

Hagar: Nay, he must have his sleep.

I'll put him here. (*Puts cradle in far corner behind screen.*) He will not hear us now.

Tell me, art happy, Abraham, my love?

Abraham:

And wherefore should I not be happy, Hagar?

Hagar:

Nay, but I feel there's something ominous,
That threatens me and this dear babe of thine,
Some threatening shadow.

Abraham: Cease thy groundless fears.

Hagar:

Nay, let me speak—so thou mayst comfort me.
I've dreamed a dream, O Abraham, my husband,
A dream wherein I saw myself cast forth
To perish in the wild and desert waste,
The sand, the burning sand; the sun o'erhead
Smiting a parching land! no trees, no shade,
No breath of wind, naught but the fearful heat;
And in mine arms, my tiny, helpless babe.
And as I stood there, face to face with doom,
I heard a voice in my dream that cried aloud:
"Hence, thou bondswoman; hence—thou and thy
son! "

O Abraham, tell me this dream is false!

Abraham:

Why, Hagar, who would harm thee? Art not my
wife?

Hagar:

I am thy wife, but thou hast still another—
Thy first, and therefore still thy best beloved.
O Abraham, 'tis true thou art most tender,
But thou art proud since I have borne a son;
Wilt thou forget me when this son is grown?

Abraham:

Nay, Hagar, I'll—I'll not forget thee.

Hagar:

Alas!

Thine eyes are for the child, and not for me.
And save when he is by us thou art silent;
Thy words of love are all for him, my husband.
Nay, I'm not jealous! But I would be loved
With that same mighty love I feel for thee!

Abraham:

Come! Thou art overwrought. I care for thee.
And—

Hagar: Abraham!

Abraham: Well?

Hagar:

There's someone standing without.

Abraham:

I see no one.

Hagar: Look. 'Tis—Sarah. [Enter SARAH.]

Sarah:

Good-even to thee, maiden, and to thee,
My husband.

Hagar: And to thee, madam.

Sarah:

How fares it with the child?

Hagar: He sleeps.

Sarah:

Let me see him, Hagar.

Hagar: But Sarah—

Sarah:

Nay, but I would see him! Wouldst prevent me?
[*Looks at babe.*]

Ah! He's a sturdy babel!

Hagar:

Nay, wake him not; lay not thine hands upon him.

Sarah:

Woman, I wish to hold him! Little one!
[*Picks up babe.*]

To-night, my babe, thou art coming to my tent—

Hagar:

Nay! Nay! O Abraham, she'd take my child!

Sarah:

Thy child? Woman, hast forgotten our pact?

Hagar:

O Sarah, thou wouldst not take my child from me?

Sarah:

The babe is mine.

Hagar: Abraham, judge between us!

Abraham:

'Tis—'tis no affair of mine. And I'll be gone.

Hagar:

Nay, thou wilt stay! Sarah! Give me my child!
[*HAGAR takes child from SARAH.*]

There! Now take him if thou darest!

Abraham:

Sarah—

Ah—why wouldst thou take the child from her,
my dear?

'Tis hers—and she should have it for her own.

Sarah:

'Tis mine! I gave her to thee! *She* knows our pact.

Abraham:

Hagar, ah, perchance thou shouldst give up the babe,
For Sarah is a woman of judgment and wisdom,

And this thy son perchance will benefit
Under her guidance. He'll be still thine own.

Sarah:

He speaks the truth, Hagar. Give me the child.

Hagar:

Abraham, I told thee that thy love
Was not for me! *She* doth command thy thought,
Thy will, thy very being. I am nothing!
But this I tell thee both: Take not my child!
Here in mine arms he stays, though all the world,
Nay God Himself, and all the legions of heaven,
Commanded me to give the child to her!
I warn thee, touch him not; or here before thee
I'll slay him—and myself! This knife—

[*Picks up knife from table.*]

Abraham: Hold, Hagar!

Hagar:

Swear, then, he'll be mine own! Swear it!

Abraham: I—I swear!

Sarah:

Well, Hagar, thou hast thy way—by wicked threats.
Thou makest me a cruel woman. I am not so.
Thou knowest full well this child must be a leader;
Well! Dost thou think that thou, a slave from
Egypt,

Can train a leader of the hosts of Abraham?

Hagar, thou hast broken thy pact with me;

For this I'll punish thee. Remember. Remember!

[*Exit SARAH.*]

Abraham:

Hagar, 'twas wicked in the sight of God,

Thus to coerce me by thy violence.

Good-night to thee! [*Exit ABRAHAM.*]

Hagar: O my babe, Ishmael! Ishmael!

Thou art mine, mine! No man shall take thee from me.

O little one! There! Safe, safe in thy mother's arms.

SCENE IV

Announcer: The years passed, and the child Ishmael grew in strength; and the love of his father, Abraham, waxed great for his son. The next scene takes place some years after the episode in Hagar's tent. The lad Ishmael, a forward boy, is standing outside his father's tent, and from within he hears music, laughter, rejoicing. He turns to a shepherd and speaks.

Ishmael (music): Huh! And wherefore this rejoicing?

Shepherd: Good lad, dost thou not know wherefore all our hearts are merry? Sarah hath borne Abraham a son.

Ishmael: I've seen him: a puling little creature. I see no cause for such a rejoicing. Tell me, fellow, was there such merriment when I was born?

Shepherd: Well, lad—thy case was different.

Ishmael: Mine? Different? Am I not the son of Abraham?

Shepherd: Aye, lad; but thou art not the son of Sarah. And 'tis ordained of God that the son of Sarah shall be the leader of this people.

Ishmael: I am the favourite of my father!

Shepherd: He loves thee, lad. 'Tis true. But come, thou art the son of an Egyptian, not of a daughter of our people. And there's the difference—if thy young mind can see it.

Ishmael: I see it, well enough—that thou art a stupid fellow full of lies!

Shepherd: Ah, little master! Thou art full of spirit!
Ha, ha!

Ishmael: Mock me not, thou—thou chaser of sheep!

Shepherd: Ha, ha, ha!

Ishmael: Here comes my mother, Hagar. I will question her.

Shepherd: Ha, ha, ha!

[*Exit SHEPHERD. Enter HAGAR.*]

Ishmael: Mother! Mother Hagar!

Hagar: Ishmael, why art thou so troubled?

Ishmael: A fellow hath told me lies; that I am to be set aside—and that—that puling babe is to have my place!

Hagar: Trouble not thy young mind with such thoughts. I have no jealousy. I am glad that God hath sent Sarah a son. What care we, lad, if he becomes the leader? Thou art mine, boy, mine—safe to be with me—and I with thee. Is that not enough?

Ishmael: I will not be turned aside.

Hagar: O lad! I see thou hast thy father's ambition. Be guided by thy mother; live in peace with this babe; there is room for thee both in the work of the world.

Ishmael: My work is to lead, not to follow!

Hagar: Ishmael! I beg thee, let not jealousy grow upon thee!

Ishmael: Here comes Sarah—and my father, bearing the babe with them! How I hate them!

[*Enter SARAH, bearing ISAAC; ABRAHAM and people.*]

Hagar: Nay, thou must love them!

Ishmael: *Hate* them, I tell thee! Ho, there! My father! Am I forgotten, that thou passest by and seest me not?

Abraham: Ishmael, wherefore is thy tone so angry?

Ishmael: Tell me here, before these men and women, that I am not cast out from thy heart!

Hagar: Ishmael, I beg thee—

Abraham: Dear son, there's no such wicked thought within my mind. Sarah, my wife, tell him there's no such thought.

Sarah: Thy father still loves thee, Ishmael.

Ishmael: Woman! I do not need thee to tell me!

Abraham: Ishmael, beware! Guard thy words, lad!

Ishmael: I'll not be silenced! As for that puling brat, that child of an old woman—fie! A weakling!

Sarah: Abraham! He shall be punished!

Hagar: O Sarah, forgive him; he is mad with jealousy!

Sarah: Hagar, long years ago I said I'd punish thee—and I have spared thee; I have shown mercy. And for my mercy God hath rewarded me with this babe in mine old age. But now thy son mocks him and me—

Hagar (kneels): Forgive him! Here, on my knees—

Sarah: I shall not forgive him! Abraham! Cast him out from my sight.

Abraham: Nay, Sarah, I beg thee—

Sarah: Cast out this bondwoman and her son! For the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son! Cast them out!

SCENE V

Announcer: And Abraham was troubled on account of his son Ishmael: "And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice, for in Isaac [Sarah's son] shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of thy

bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it upon her shoulder . . . and sent her away; and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. And the water in the bottle was spent. . . ." And now we see the desert.

Hagar: Courage, Ishmael—courage!

Ishmael: Mother, the sun! The sun! I cannot go farther. Water, O mother, water! Why dost thou deny me! Water! mother!

Hagar: Ishmael, there is no water.

Ishmael (seeing mirage): Yes! There's water yonder! Cool—cool! Let me plunge in it! Drink of it! Look, mother, how it sparkles!

Hagar: Dear God, he is mad! Ishmael, dearest; I see naught but the sand, and the pitiless sky.

Ishmael: Nay! There are trees, and cool shadows and—ah! Gone! Gone! Where is yonder pool! Gone! Thou art right—the sand and pitiless sky.

Hagar: Courage, dear one. A little longer, a little further—

Ishmael: I can go no more. Water, mother! As you love me—as—oh—I—I—I am tired—how dark it grows! My eyes, so tired—

Hagar: Rest thee, my son, here beneath this bush; there is a tiny patch of shade.

Ishmael: Mother—

Hagar: Yes, little son?

Ishmael: What have we done, thus to be punished?

Hagar: Hush! Hush!

Ishmael: Mother, where am I? In my tent. Everything is all right. It's growing dark—but you're here.

I'm not afraid. But don't go, mother, I want you here beside me—while I fall asleep.

Hagar: O God, he sleeps—or is it death?

Oh, let me not look upon the death of my child. Abraham!

O cruel, cruel one! And all the love I bore thee—this my reward! O God—God of love and of mercy—

Thou art not a god of revenge, and of meaningless suffering—O God of love, hear me. Not for myself I cry out, but for this innocent one, this little one, this child. (*With a change of voice.*) Nay, this is not true; it could not be; 'tis a dream! This sand—the cruel sun—my little one lying as in death—'tis a dream! (*With a cry of relief.*) Ah! All is well—I'm in my tent—I'm— Abraham, Abraham! Art thou there? Look—our little one, our babe! Shhh, he sleeps! Look, how like thine his mouth—and his brow—thine—thy very own. Shhh! Wake him not. Tell me, art thou happy, O my love? I'll sing him a lullaby, this babe of ours:

Rest thee now, my little one,

Rest thee, for the day is done

Hmmmmm, hmmmmm.

Rest thee— [She screams.]

O God! I'm mad! 'Tis no dream!

Ishmael (feebly): Mother. Mother—

Hagar: Oh, God—God of love and compassion—for Thou art the only God. Turn not Thy face away from the suffering of this child. (*Music, of an unearthly, ethereal sort.*) Music! Nay, 'tis my madness. But the sun still blazes above in the sky, and the hot sand about me.

Angel (off-stage): Hagar! Hagar! (*Intoning.*)

Hagar: A voice, as from heaven!

Angel (intoned): Fear not. For God hath heard the voice of thy child. Arise! Lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand. For God will make of him a great nation.

Hagar: O voice angelic—

Ishmael: Mother! Look—look! Water!

Hagar: Water—

Ishmael: O mother, I knew thou wouldst bring me to safety.

Hagar: Not I, dear son, but God—the God of Love.

THE MESS OF POTPAGE

CHARACTERS: ESAU BEERI, her father
JUDITH, his wife REBECCA
JACOB

SCENES: 1. THE HUT OF ESAU
2. THE SAME
3. THE HOME OF JACOB
4. THE HUT OF ESAU

SCENE I

Announcer: Now, there was born to Isaac and Rebekah in the land of Beer-lahai-roi two sons, Jacob and Esau. And as Esau grew to manhood he became a great hunter, living in the fields, under the open sky, and finding shelter wheresoever night overtook him. Not for him the restraints of a daily routine! Not for him the slow and irksome labour of tending flocks and tilling the ground! His was a heart bold and daring and merry, chafing under all restraint; loving liberty. And to find this liberty he forsook the tent of his father; left the well-ordered life of a farmer in the valley.

Now, his brother Jacob, the younger of the two, remained with his parents, and hearkened obediently to the voice of his mother Rebekah. Whatsoever she desired him to do, he did. Upon his shoulders fell the labour of the flocks and fields; his the tilling and the harvest, for his father Isaac had grown old and blind, and there was no man to help Jacob with the daily rou-

tine. Now, it came to pass that Esau the hunter took to wife Judith, the daughter of Beerî the Hittite, a stranger to his father's tribe.

The first scene opens shortly after the marriage of Esau. Esau has left his wife Judith in their shelter on the wild slopes of a mountain, his hunting ground, to journey into the valley to the home of his parents. He has been gone since early morning; night has fallen; and as the darkness deepens, as the stars come out one by one in the black arch of the sky; as the night wind rises, moaning in the trees, Judith, the Hittite girl, goes to the door of her shelter and peers into the gloom.

Judith:

How dark it grows! He will not find his way.
There is no light save from yon feeble stars
That all encompassed are by scudding clouds!
Oh, now the wind calls with its lonely voice,
And fills the void of night with eerie sounds;
But there's no sound of footsteps coming hither,
Nor yet his voice sounding a cheery cry.
He's lost! And I'm alone; and the darkness here—
O Esau! *Esau!* (*Regaining her courage.*) Nay,
I must still my fears.

Hold! There's a step—another—yet another!
Yonder in the darkness—shall I call his name?
Perchance it is not he! Perchance some rover,
Some prowling creature who would do me harm;
There! The sound again—and closer now!

Beerî (old man, off):

Ho, Judith!

Judith:

Oh, God be thanked! It is my father's voice!
Father! Father!

Beeri (entering):

My child! So dark the night I lost my way,
And almost passed thy shelter in the gloom.

Judith:

What brings thee here at this hour?

Beeri:

I came from my tent to fetch thee this little gift.
Where's Esau? He's not here? Hunting so late?

Judith:

Nay, father, he is gone into the valley.

Beeri:

Valley, valley? What takes him yonder, Judith?

Judith:

To tell his father and his mother: He's married.

Beeri:

Ho, ho, ho! A pleasant errand, eh?
How will they take it, thinkest thou?

Judith:

I do not know; and it hath worried me.
But I'm more worried that Esau's not returned.
He said he would be here before the twilight,
And he's not come—and now I fear he's lost!

Beeri:

Poof, girl! A hunter such as Esau—lost?
A man who knows these hills from peak to valley,
Each slope, each forest; who can find his way
Unguided through the trackless wilderness?
Such a man—lost?

Judith: Then why hath he not come?

Beeri:

Well, that's another matter. Perchance 'tis some-
thing
Yonder that doth detain him.

Judith:

What would detain him when he knows I'm alone,
And waiting for him?

Beeri:

Well, Judith, I do not like to raise the question,
But hast considered what his parents may say?

Judith:

Parents?

Beeri:

Thou art a stranger to his tribe, my girl.
As good as he, but still a stranger, Judith.
And—

Judith:

And thou thinkest *they* will turn him from his wife?

Beeri:

Well, it hath been done—and many times, my lass.

Judith:

Thou dost not know my husband!

Beeri:

I know men.

He's the first-born; his birthright is no poor one.
Land and flocks and—

Judith: Well!

Beeri:

Well, they may prevail upon thy husband
That 'tis not wise to marry a stranger girl—
Urge him to leave thee.
I do not know. I merely raise the question.
Prepare for all—and then no evil harms you.

Judith (scornful laugh):

Ha, ha! Leave me, for land and sheep!
Because his father and his mother say so!
If he is such a man, then let him go!
If he is such a man—

[*A cry outside.*]

Esau: Ho, Judith!

Judith:

He comes! It is my husband!

Esau (off):

Ho—Judith!

Beerli: He calls right cheerily!

Judith:

Esau! Esau! Give me the taper, father!

Beerli:

Here! [*Gives her taper. She goes to door.*]

Judith: Esau! I wait for thee! [*ESAU enters.*]

Esau:

Judith—my love. My dear.

Judith:

Yes—hold me close to thee; it was so dark!

And thou didst not return, and—

Esau: Well, now I'm here!

Why, I ran half way up the hill to beat the night;

But it came fast, and dropped its wings about me.

And Beerli, thy father, here!

Judith:

He is just come.

Beerli: Aye, just this moment come!

Esau:

A little supper for a hungry man; what, Judith?

Judith:

Here's meat for thee, Esau; come, sit thee down
at table.

Esau (sitting):

Father Beerli, join me.

Beerli: Oh, I am always willing, Esau.

[*Sits by him at table.*]

Esau:

Ha, ha! And a little wine. Willing for that?

Beerì:

Well, maybe—maybe. If thou didst urge me, Esau.

Esau:

Old rascal. Ha, ha!

Beerì: Come, Esau! Thy news! Thy news!

Esau:

News?

Beerì:

Judith and I both wait to hear thy report;

How did thy parents—take it?

Esau: Oh—ha, ha, ha!

Beerì:

Laugh not, Esau—tell us!

Judith:

Oh, tell us, Esau! What did—thy mother—say?

Beerì:

And thy father, Esau—what did he think of it?
Eh?

Esau:

Well, Beerì, I see thou wilt not let me eat,
So I will tell thee. Ha! I entered their tent.

Beerì:

Yes! Yes! Go on—

Esau:

There sat my father; and my mother by him.
And working in the corner, as usual, my brother
Jacob.

Methought: “How will I say it?” I had a speech,
A fitting speech within my mind.

Beerì: Well? Well?

Esau:

Then I could not say it—

Judith: Oh! Thou wert ashamed of me!

Esau:

Nay! Nay, dearest! But I'm no man of words.
Then as I stammered some greeting,
My father spoke to me—

Oh, kindly words,
For he doth love me—he hath always loved me,
For we are alike, we both do love the chase,
The mountain heights, the clean cold morning air.

Beeri:

Come to thy story! What didst thou say to him!

Esau:

Well, I did give him venison, and he blessed me,
Thanked me, with tears in his eyes. That gave
me courage,
And so I said: "I've married Judith the Hittite."
So—just that, no more.

Judith: And then?

Esau:

And then! Ha, ha, ha!

Beeri: Well? Well?

Esau: My brother pursed his lips so righteously!
My mother frowned! The storm descended. They
pleaded, they threatened. Offered me land, to leave
thee. More than my birthright called for.

Judith: Well!

Esau: I refused.

Judith: My loyal one!

Esau:

Nay! I knew they did not mean such folly!
And I waited. And soon I saw my father's eyes
Lose their stern look. He called me to his side,
And while my brother looked with veiled daggers,
My father forgave me.

Judith:

And thy mother? Thy mother? What of her?

Esau (more soberly):

Well, she did not forgive me, Judith!

Judith:

Oh!

Esau:

I have offended her; I have disobeyed.

I've married one who is not of my tribe.

Judith:

But she'll forgive thee?

Esau:

She is a stern and unrelenting woman;

I fear I cannot heal the breach between us.

Judith:

O Esau! I would not have thy mother turn from
thee

Because of me; and yet what can I do?

And yet I must do something!

Beer:

Now, my daughter, let me speak. It's not the
mother,

It's the *father* that counts. And he's forgiven Esau,
And Esau's birthright is safe—and all is well!

Judith:

Esau, let us go swiftly to see thy mother!

Let me beseech her, and—

Esau:

Why shouldest thou? I'm not at fault. Nor thou.

Judith:

But, Esau, think, think! She'll turn thy father
against thee.

She'll give thy birthright into Jacob's hands!

I fear her!

Esau:

Nay, nay! Come, my little one; come, my timid dove!

I'll care for thee; I'll shelter thee from harm.

Judith:

But a woman, Esau! A woman never forgives!
She'll punish thee so she may punish me!

Esau:

I'll chance her punishment! I'd rather be
Here, with thee—in poverty—nay, want!
In this little hut, far on the mountainside,
Than yonder in the valley, a slave to sodden duty;
Doing *this* for her, and *that* for her;
Putting her first in all things—like my brother!

Judith:

But thou dost love her?

Esau:

I love her—yes! But I've my life, to lead.
And it will be my own, not some one's else!
That's why I came to these hills. And now thou
knowest!

She would engulf me—she would own my soul!
And I will have my soul unto myself!

Judith:

I tell thee, Jacob will get thy birthright from thee!

Esau:

My brother? What does he do—what's he
become?

Himself? Nay! An echo, a shadow! A puppet!
Chained, chained by his own fidelity.

If *that* is life, if that is love, let him have it!

I call it slavery.

Judith:

We should go to the valley!

Esau:

Oh, Judith, let us live our lives together,
Here in the mountains 'twixt the earth and sky,
As free as eagles o'er the twilight crags
That swoop and soar far, far above the hills,
And have no kingdom save the limitless sky.

Judith:

We are not eagles, Esau; we're man and woman.
And thou hast thy birthright yonder in the valley.
Thou shouldst go there; protect it from thy
brother.

Esau:

Poof! I do not want it.

Judith:

But my children may want it!
They cannot love like eagles, Esau, my husband!

Esau:

We'll think of all that, Judith—when there's need.

Judith:

Esau, we must leave these hills; we must leave
this life.

If thou wert to go yonder with me—

If we were to work—

If I could make thy mother love me—

Esau:

I'll not leave these hills! I'll not give up my
freedom!

Judith:

Think, Esau—think of me!

Esau: Oh,—let me eat!

Judith:

Esau, I fear thy mother—

I fear for thy birthright—

Our children's birthright. I fear for it!

SCENE II

Announcer: Five years pass. Esau has remained a hunter in the hills; Jacob has remained by his father and his mother. He has seen his father's lands grow, his flocks multiply under his care. Meanwhile Esau has nothing—but a family.

Now, it came to pass that hunting grew lean and uncertain in the hills. Day after day Esau went forth to the chase, and returned at night empty-handed. His wife Judith and their two children grew thin and pale, and weaker day by day. Now, one morning Esau rose even before the dawn, and went forth into the mists. All morning he hunted, with an energy born of despair. But he saw nothing; and returned at mid-morning, empty-handed.

His wife sees him from the door, and knows by the look of despair upon his face that he has had no success. He comes to her, a tired man, and drops down beside her.

Esau (enters): Again, nothing.

Judith: I knew it from thy face.

Esau: Not a track—nothing! Nothing!

Judith: Be not faint-hearted; to-morrow thou shalt find something.

Esau: No! I tell thee there's a curse on these hills! And I must have food—for thee, and for our children! I must!

Judith: They sleep now, thank God. But soon they'll wake and cry for food.

Esau: Tell me not! I know! I know!

Judith: And yet we must not lose heart!

Esau: O Judith, Judith! I have no right to bring

such misery on thee! I should have returned to the valley—taken up the routine of labour. I—

Judith: Have we not been happy here? We shall yet be happy again.

Esau: My loyal one! And yet I must find food—and quickly.

Judith: To-morrow—

Esau: Oh, speak not of to-morrow! I tell thee, there's no game in these hills! I've tramped o'er every foot of ground! I've gone ten miles since dawn—and seen nothing! And there'll be nothing to-morrow.

Judith: O Esau, what's to become of us!

Esau: Oh, I must find a way! Something!

Judith: Here comes my father Beeri—look how weak he has grown. He scarce can drag himself up yonder rise. [Enter BEERI.]

Esau: Good father Beeri, didst see a track, a sign of game?

Beeri: Nothing. Nothing.

Judith: Come, we must not lose heart.

Beeri: I'm tired. I'm faint. Let me rest.

Esau: Perhaps in the hills yonder—

Beeri: I went there yesterday; and there's nothing—nothing.

Judith (breaking down): Oh!

Esau: Shhh. Courage!

Beeri: We're doomed, I tell thee. Doomed.

[A pause, then a cry.]

Esau: What's that cry?

Judith: Our children, Esau! Calling out in their hunger.

Esau: O God! I must find something! Perhaps in the valley—

Beeri: The valley—yes, the valley!

Esau: Thinkest thou there's game yonder?

Beeri: Game, no! But there's grain—there's sheep—there's thy father's wealth—

Esau: I will not go to him—and be mocked by my brother! Never!

Judith: Esau—you cannot let us die—

Beeri: You must go to your father, Esau. Remember, you have a birthright—he will not let his eldest-born starve! [Exit BEERI.]

Esau: O humiliation! What will my mother say! I can hear her! “So you've come—begging—for your brats, eh?” Fagh!

Judith: She could not be so cruel!

Esau: And Jacob, pursing up his lips: “Oh, you've come for food, have you? Well, work for it!” Fagh!

Judith: You've no right to have pride—now. You must go. (*A cry again.*) Listen, Esau—how the children cry out! Does that not touch your heart—and banish your stubborn pride?

Esau: Yes, yes—I'll go! I'll go.

Judith: Oh, bring us food—and quickly! Or we perish—

SCENE III

Announcer: And so Esau sets out for the valley, to seek food for his starving family. Now, as he hurries along the tents of his father Isaac come in sight, the rich yellow fields of grain, the flocks of sheep.

As Esau is hurrying towards the tents, Jacob his brother is hard at work in the threshing room. The bright sunlight makes golden patterns on the floor, and through the open door comes a gentle breeze, laden with the fragrance of the meadows. Jacob, hearing a step behind him, pauses in his labours, and turns.

Jacob: O mother!

Rebecca: My dearest son—faithfully at work!

Jacob: The threshing's almost finished.

Rebecca: Then thou shouldst be happy.

Jacob: Happy—ha!

Rebecca: Why, what's the matter, Jacob?

Jacob: How can I be happy when I know that all this labour—all this care and planning, all these lands, these flocks that I tend—are not for me.

Rebecca: Well, they're thy father's, and therefore thine—some day.

Jacob: Yes, part of them—the lesser part; the greater part is for that ne'er-do-well Esau—and his alien wife, and their beggar brood! Why, sometimes I'm tempted to lay down my tasks—let the fields grow up in weeds, let wolves devour the flocks and—

Rebecca: Wait, my son. It is true that thy brother still has his birthright—

Jacob: Aye, and when my father dies, Esau will come here with that cursed laugh of his, and take his inheritance—and we cannot prevent him!

Rebecca: We may yet prevent him.

Jacob: How?

Rebecca: Jacob, thou knowest how sorely thy brother hath offended me—taking an alien wife, against my wishes; and his care-free manner of life, mocking our honest labours.

Jacob: Well?

Rebecca: Perchance it is not too late to turn thy father's heart against him. Wait, let me finish! It is many weeks now since Esau hath brought thy father venison. Let us say in thy father's presence how we have heard that Esau cannot be bothered to come the long journey from the hills to see a feeble old man! Let

us whisper that he has been heard to say that he will keep his venison for himself—that he has none to spare for—

Jacob (looking through window): Mother!

Rebecca: Whom do you see that you stare?

Jacob: Look—look yonder! Coming through the field.

Rebecca: Esau!

Jacob: No doubt he comes with venison, to win my father's heart—to keep within his graces!

Rebecca: Jacob, he bears no venison. Why, he's white, and his steps lag, as though a great weakness was upon him!

Jacob: Look, he snatches at the tassels of grain, and eats them like a hungry wolf! I'll drive him out of my fields! I'll—

Rebecca: Wait—wait! There's hunger on his face—desperate hunger. It is for that his face is white, his steps weak.

Jacob: If he is come here for food, he'll get none!

Rebecca: Jacob! Jacob! Now—now is thy chance!

Jacob: Well?

Rebecca: He's starving!

Jacob: I see thy plan! I'll sell him food—but at a heavy price!

Rebecca: Aye! A heavy price—his birthright!

Jacob: He will not sell his birthright—albeit he is starving!

Rebecca: He is almost here. Guard thy words.

Esau (off): Jacob, Jacob!

Jacob: Mother—

Rebecca: Yes?

Jacob: Look—he cannot see thee through this window—look how he straightens himself; he would not show me his desperate need!

Rebecca: But we know! Remember—this may be thy chance.

Esau (off:) O Jacob, may I enter?

Jacob: Yes, enter, Esau. [*Enter ESAU.*]

Esau: Greetings to thee, mother, and to thee, Jacob.

Rebecca: What brings thee here, my son?

Esau: Oh, I turned from my hunting to see ye all.

Rebecca: Thou art white, my son.

Esau: White? I? 'Tis thy fancy.

Jacob: Is it well with thy wife and children?

Esau: They live free as the wind, good brother.

Rebecca: Why art thou leaning against the door, good son? Art tired?

Esau: Oh, tired enough—but it will pass. That's rich looking grain, my brother!

Jacob: Yes! I have toiled to make it rich and full.

Esau: I've a fancy for a taste of it—and methinks it would be pleasing to my wife.

Jacob: Well, I will sell it. What hast thou to offer?

Esau: My love.

Jacob: A poor trade.

Esau: Come, we are brothers! Must we talk of trade and barter? I tell thee, I crave a little grain—no more than I can carry. Wilt thou refuse me?

Jacob: I do.

Esau: Mother, I ask thee if that—

Rebecca: Do not appeal to me—thou hast always gone against my will, Esau. Why shouldst thou call on me now?

Esau: Mother, art thou still so bitter against me?

Rebecca: 'Tis a bitterness thou hast brought on thyself.

Esau: I—I cannot quarrel with thee, Jacob. I ask thee for grain—and thou dost refuse me. I have

naught to give thee in trade. Must I *take* what I want?

Jacob: Try to take it.

Esau: By our God—

Jacob: Get hence with thy threats and thy blasphemy!

Esau: I must have it! I must have food!

Jacob: Threaten me, eh? Why, thou art so weak thou scarce canst stand. Ha, ha! Thou art starving—Esau! Thou and thy beggar's brood! We saw thee snatch the tassels of the grain as thou didst come hither through the fields! We know thou art starving!

Esau: Well? If I am starving, is that reason to refuse me?

Jacob: Get grain elsewhere. I have none for thee.

Esau: Mother—

Rebecca: Esau, this is between thee and thy brother.

Esau: Yes, Jacob, I am starving—and my wife and children.

Jacob: I have told thee that I will sell thee food.

Esau: At a price I cannot pay.

Jacob: At a price thou canst pay!

Esau: Well, tell me—I will pay it!

Jacob: It is thy birthright.

Esau: My birthright—for a mess of pottage!

Jacob: You know the terms, Esau.

Esau: But they are—wicked terms!

Rebecca: Esau, do you speak of wickedness? You who have chosen to go against my will, you who have—

Esau: What good to speak of that now!

Rebecca: You have heard your brother, Esau. He will sell you food—if you will pay.

Esau: Renounce—my—birthright!

Jacob: Come! Your answer, Esau!

Esau: Answer—ha! As though thou didst not know

it already! For what shall my birthright profit me, when, behold, I am at the point to die—and my children and my wife, also!

Jacob: Then renounce it. Swear.

Esau: Give me food!

Jacob: Here is food—but renounce first thy birthright!

Esau: I—I renounce my birthright—for this mess of pottage.

SCENE IV

Announcer: And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and went his way.

Strengthened by food, he hurried on towards his home, bearing his precious bundle. He crossed the valley, and began to climb the hill; and as he reached the bend in the road his humble shelter came in sight. From the open door he heard voices, those of his wife and her father; but, lo, they were merry voices! And there was laughter. And Esau hurried on, wondering. Now he reaches the door. [*Knocking.*]

[*JUDITH and BEERI on stage.*]

Judith: Esau! Esau! Come in! God hath been good to us!

Esau (entering with pottage): Good?

Judith: There's food within waiting for thee!

Esau: Food—here?

Beeri: Aye, my son! And 'twas I that brought it not an hour after thou didst leave us for the valley!

Esau: Thou hast found food?

Judith: Tell him, father!

Beeri: Esau, I followed thee a little ways, and as I reached the brook I sat to rest me. Then, of a sudden,

came a crunching of twigs, and I looked behind me, and there stood a stag—a big one.

Judith: Big? Why, look at this haunch of venison, my husband.

Beer: I was all a-tremble. But I grooved my arrow and let fly—and down he came. And all is well!

Esau: Oh, all is well! You have food. Ha ha! Ha, ha!

Judith: Yes, rejoice with us! We're saved!

Esau: Ha, ha! Ha, ha!

Judith: Esau, thy laugh is like unto a laugh of madness, not joy!

Esau: Nay! I rejoice with thee. And I, too, have food—have food!

Judith: Ah, pottage. And thy brother gave it to thee freely?

Esau: Nay, I bought it.

Beer: When thou wert starving he made thee buy it?

Judith: But, Esau, surely for no great price.

Esau: Oh, no great price! No great price!

Beer: How much? Eh? The promise of a haunch of venison?

Esau: Oh, less than that—less—

Judith: Less? What was it?

Esau: The jest is sweet! The price—the price was my birthright.

Judith: Thy birthright! For this pottage?

Esau: To save thee and thy children.

Beer: Thy birthright—gone?

Esau: Well, say it not again. We know it!

Judith: Father, leave us together.

Beer: Gone, thy birthright for a mess of pottage. Ha! And here's meat! It is a jest—and a rare one. And I might as well laugh as cry. Ha! why not? There's enough crying in this world—and at least I can

laugh—I can laugh! Ha, ha! Ho, ha! [*Exit BEERI.*]

Esau: Gone, Judith—everything.

Judith: Yes.

Esau: Scorn me for it; perchance I deserve it. Oh, I'm a blundering fool. A failure! What have I brought you but misery! And now what have you to look forward to? Everything I do seems to—to go wrong; and now this! This!

Judith: Esau, you could not help it. Dearest.

Esau: I should have gone to the valley on that day you told me. I've been selfish! I've had my own way—and I'm paying for it, and making you and our children pay.

Judith: Esau, have you been unhappy?

Esau: No, no, Judith.

Judith: I haven't. And we haven't got much—and maybe not much to look forward to, in the way of wealth and luxury; but, Esau, do you remember what you said once, how we would live like eagles between the earth and sky?

Esau: Yes, I said that.

Judith: And we have! And I'm not sorry! Do you think *they're* happier, down there in the valley—scheming, planning, plotting, grasping, gaining? Do you? I know they're not! Don't tell me you're a failure! You're not! You haven't any land, but you've got the sky at dawn, and the sunset; no music of evenings, but you've the song of the night wind, and the voice of the tempest. And look—look! Something else, here, in this room. [*They look in children's room.*]

Esau: They're sleeping. Shhhh.

Judith: And they're happy—with the whole mountain for their playground. And you with them, and I with you—we haven't lost so much, after all!

JUDITH

CHARACTERS: JUDITH OF BETHULIA	HOLOFERNES
HER FATHER	A CAPTAIN
HER BROTHER	BOY

SCENES: 1. THE HOME OF JUDITH IN BETHULIA
 2. THE CAMP OF HOLOFERNES
 3. THE SAME. THREE DAYS LATER

SCENE I

Announcer: In the hill country of Judea, guarding the pass that led to Jerusalem, stood Bethulia, a city of staunch walls. For days the army of Holofernes had encamped before them, thwarted for the time being by the massive battlements.

But already thirst and hunger had weakened the resolution of the people of the city, and, as our story opens, the word has run from house to house that the elders of Bethulia have decided on surrender on the morrow.

In a room close by the main gate of the city an old man looks with stolid eyes upon the excited, clamorous crowds below him; with him his daughter Judith.

Old Man:

Judith.

Judith: Father?

Old Man: What is the news they bear?

Judith (at window):

Some fatal news—for look upon their faces!

And their voices like those of men who cry in
torment,

Beseeching mercy when there is no mercy!

Old Man:

But the news—the news! What is this thing they
cry? [Street noises cease.]

Judith:

Hark! How sudden silent they are; a stillness,
Like the cold hand of death reaching upon them
And stilling every tongue; the crowd hath scattered,
And little groups of desolate men are left
Who turn away, their gaze upon the ground.
What may this mean? What news to cause this
silence?

Old Man:

Judith, I hear a step; thy brother cometh.

Judith:

Oh, surely he will bring the news to us!
[Knocking.]

Old Man:

He knocks. Admit him. (*Enter SON.*) Well,
my son, we wait

The news! For surely thou hast tidings for us.

Son:

Aye—evil tidings; scarce can I unfold them.

Old Man:

Well? Speak!

Son: Bethulia falls to-morrow.

Judith:

Falls!

Son: Nay, surrenders—with its walls unbreached!
The elders of the city have lost hope.

Old Man:

If they despair, have they not cause a-plenty?

Our people cry in the streets, and hunger stalks
With ruthless tread, and grim Death follows after.

Son:

And yet the walls are unbreached; we should not
fall

While yet a man's alive!

Judith: 'Tis cowardice!

Old Man:

'Tis true; our walls have held the foe at bay;

But it were better if we fall by the sword,

Than to be tortured by the pangs of thirst.

Why as I sat here last night, from the darkened
street

I could hear cries of anguish from each side,

The cries of little children, racked by torment.

Judith:

Enough! Oh, say no more. We, too, have heard
them!

Son:

If Bethulia falls, Jerusalem falls,

Judea falls, our nation is enslaved!

Oh, would that they could gird their hearts with
courage,

These faltering ones who would betray the city!

Better to make one fierce assault of madness,

And, fighting, die upon the Assyrians' swords!

But come, my father, since the city falls,

We must make preparation for thy safety—

And thine, my sister Judith.

Old Man:

We wish no safety

Save that which all our people share with us.

Son:

Father, thou knowest what fate will come to them!

Death for thee; and for thy daughter, shame.

But I've a plan to save thee; there's a gate
Unguarded at this hour; we shall slip out.
Come; we must start; there is no time to lose.

Old Man:

Nay, my son; I am too told to flee; but *thou*,
Judith—

Judith: Save myself? I—I cannot.

Old Man: Judith, thou must!

Son:

Sister, thou knowest what fate awaits thee here!

Old Man:

Come! What makes thee go against my will?

Judith:

I know not, save a voice that cries to me—
In every note of pain, the children's voices—
That *something* must be done, I know not what.
And yet I cannot leave them to the sword!

Old Man:

But, Judith, there is naught that *thou* canst do!

Son:

Why, Judith, thou art but a woman!

Judith:

Well!

A woman hath a heart—perchance some courage!
A life to give.

Old Man:

A life to waste, my daughter.

What shall it profit thee to linger here?

Son:

Why, Judith, this Holofernes is a fiend!
I have heard—

Judith:

This Holofernes is a man,
No demon out of hell. He hath a heart.
Perchance a heart that can be wrought upon.

Son:

What madness doth thou utter now, my sister?

Judith:

Why dost thou call it madness? Did I speak
Of madness, when thy rashness urged thee on
To crave a useless death without the walls?
Because I am a woman, must I wait
And meet what fate doth come? Nay! I shall go
And seek out Holofernes in his tent.
There is more strategy than force of arms.

Old Man:

Daughter, cease thy jesting! What—

Judith: I do not jest.

Son:

To-night—to Holofernes—alone?

Judith:

Alone.

Inform the guard to let me pass the gate.
Seek out the elders of the city. Tell them
This above all: Let there be no surrender!

Old Man:

Nay, Judith! My son, hold her! She must not go!

Son:

Judith! Thou knowest what fate
Awaits a woman of *thy* comeliness
Within the camp of Holofernes!

Judith:

Aye.

And yet—I go to seek him out to-night.

Son:

Nay, Judith! It were a useless sacrifice.
Give not thy womanhood to death—or shame.

Judith:

The shame were to be timid. I go, to-night.

[*Exit* JUDITH.]

SCENE II

Announcer: That night in his tent, amid a luxury

that stands out in bold contrast to the bare tents of his soldiers, sits Holofernes, leader of the Assyrians. A man in the prime of life, a man of proud bearing and imperious face, he dominates his captains who are grouped about him. When he smiles, it is their cue to smile. When Holofernes frowns, they frown. And at his lightest jest— [Mob laughter. HOLOFERNES and his men at table.]

Captain:

Truly said, O Holofernes! The walls,
For all their strength, are but the walls of death.

Holofernes (loud):

Nay, hear me! I have not finished!

Voices:

Shhh!

Hold thy tongue, Ramon! Let the general—

Holofernes:

Ha, ha! The jest—I laugh ere I can tell it—

Ha, ha! I told my men to carry jugs of water,

And set them out within bowshot o' the walls;

Then, when the parched dogs looked down upon
them,

I cried: "Come out, for here is water aplenty!"

Then, when their torment reached its greatest
frenzy—

For sight of water maddened them withal—

I broke the casks, and let the water spill

Upon the sand. Ha, ha, ha! How long will they
resist,

Think you?

Captain: Another night; another day.

No longer. We shall enter in their city,

Nor shall we lose a single man, my lord!

Holofernes:

Then it were lightly won; but come, my gal-
lants!

Ye drink too cautiously for men at arms!

Come—the cups. And music! Ha! yonder city
Hath need of merriment. We'll give them some!

Ha, ha!

Music! [*Music.*]

Are my dancers asleep so early o' the night?

Hither—aye, thou maiden! Come! We wait for
thee! [*Enter a dancer.*]

Hmm. She is comely—and young; aye, very
young!

Here's gold for thee, young wench! Come!

Dance for me. [*Music of a dance.*]

Captain, think ye that music stirred the heart of
Israel

To mirth, so that they danced upon their walls?

[*General laughter.*]

They say, and we shall see how true the report,

That there be maidens yonder fair enough

To grace the court of kings. What think ye,
captain?

Captain:

That we shall see ourselves, O Holofernes.

Holofernes:

I would be merciful—to comely women.

For I am merciful if nothing else, eh?

Captain:

General, we know that thou art merciful!

Holofernes:

So long as they be not too homely, captain.

[*Laughter.*]

And now, my lords, one cup to cap the night.

Captain:

And here's a toast; long life to Holofernes!

[*They drink.*]

All:

Long life to Holofernes!

Holofernes:

Good-night to ye.

All:

Good-night, general. Fare thee well, Holofernes.

[*This dies away as they exit, all save captain.*]

Holofernes:

Captain; ah, one moment. Stay, for I would see thee.

Captain:

Aye, my lord?

Holofernes:

Tell me, that little dancer; hast thou seen her
In Nineveh?

Captain: Nay, my lord.

Holofernes:

No matter, captain!

I would see her again—go bid her come.

Captain:

Now, my lord?

Holofernes:

Aye, now. Didst hear me, sir?

[*Exit CAPTAIN.*]

Boy! Wine. And when thou hast brought it—go.

Boy (reaches door and returns):

My lord—

Holofernes:

Well, boy! Why art thou returned! Hast thou
fetched the wine

So swiftly?

Boy: Nay, my lord. But—

Holofernes: Do as I commanded!

Boy:

My lord, there—there's one without the tent
That would have words with thee.

Holofernes:

With me?

Now? Well, tell him to be gone.

Boy:

Pardon, my lord,

'Tis not a man.

Holofernes: Not a man? Not a man?

Boy:

A woman, my lord.

Holofernes: And what manner of woman, boy?

Boy:

A woman of the Hebrews, good my lord.

Holofernes:

Here, to my tent? What brings the creature hence?

Boy:

She hath some tidings for thee.

Holofernes:

Tidings, thou sayest?

No doubt a spy, to sell some secret to me.

These hags will sell their very souls for gold.

Boy:

O good my lord, this woman is no hag!

More like a queen, my lord; her beauty brightens

The sombre night, and dazzles, like the sun.

Holofernes:

Thou sayest she's beautiful?

Boy:

O Holofernes,

Trust not my word, but see her for thyself,

And thou wilt say she is the peer of women,

More radiant than the fabled queens of Tyre

Who, with their beauty, blinded the eyes of men.

Holofernes:

I will see this woman for myself.

Hence, bid her enter!

Boy (going off): The general bids thee enter.

[*Exit* BOY. *Enter* JUDITH.]

Holofernes:

Um! Woman, what brings thee to my tent?

Judith:

The command of God, my lord.

Holofernes (light): God? I know him not.

Judith:

Nay, Holofernes, 'twere better if thou didst.

Holofernes:

Thy words are bold, woman of Bethulia.

Judith:

I speak to a bold warrior, my lord, in kind.

Holofernes:

And to what errand—did thy god commend thee?

Judith:

My lord, 'tis said that thou art merciless,

And yet thy face is not the face of one

Whose heart is cruel.

Holofernes:

Ha, flattery, thou subtle one!

What now? What favour, eh? Come! Tell me,

I bid thee,

Judith:

My lord, if thou couldst be within our walls,

Perchance 'twould move thy heart—even as mine,

To hear the cries of the children in their anguish.

Nay, Holofernes, if thy heart were blacker

Than any demon's from the pit of hell,

It would be moved by the voice of little children.

They say, my lord, thou hast no thought for
suffering—

But they say wrong! Thou art a man, my lord;

Even thy power and glory hath not made thee

Less human than myself; and so I beg thee

For mercy. We have done thee naught of evil.
Compassion will not make thee less a man!

Holofernes:

Compassion, woman, is not i' the trade of war.

Judith:

Come, Holofernes, art thou bold enough
To change a cruel custom?

Holofernes: In what way?

Judith:

Spare my city, that hath done thee no wrong.

Holofernes:

Woman, I am a soldier. I must obey.

Judith:

And doth my lord think he will be victorious?
'Tis true that thou canst conquer Bethulia—
But, Holofernes, beware! We have ally
More powerful than all the hosts of kings.

Holofernes:

First thou pleadest for mercy, and then dost threat.
Strange woman, what ally should I fear?

Judith:

The lord of heaven—the embattled God of Israel!

Holofernes:

I do not know thy god; I'll chance his rage.
But come—sit by me; let us speak of things
That have no taint of war and punishment.
Thy beauty, since it is so absolute
And will not have denial.

[*He makes her sit by him.*]

What's thy name?

Judith:

Judith.

Holofernes (smiling unpleasantly): Judith of Bethulia—queen of all Judea.

Judith:

Nay, my lord—mockery doth not become thee.

Holofernes:

Come, wouldst thou be queen? I'll make thee queen—

When I have conquered yonder land for thee.

Judith:

It is a cruel jest, O Holofernes.

Holofernes:

Woman, thou art more bold than all thy people.

With twenty thousand such as thee to fight,

Mine armies would be vanquished!

Judith: They *will* be, my lord.

Holofernes:

Come, leave me not. The night is young, Judith.

Judith:

My lord, thou art not subtle.

Holofernes: I'm a soldier.

Judith:

A cruel one, my lord.

Holofernes: Nay, I shall show thee.

Judith:

Yet thy face, Holofernes—thy face is somewhat gentle;

And—and I did hope— Thine eyes have tenderness—

Holofernes:

Go not, Judith!

Judith: I'll come again, my lord.

Think on these things that I have said to thee.

Good-night. [Exit JUDITH. A pause.]

Holofernes:

Judith! She is gone. What manner of woman

Is this! I do not know such women.

Why, she did speak as though she were my equal!
And yet she is a woman—
Yea, utterly a woman to mine eyes;
Full blossomed like the rose of Assur. [*Knocking.*]

Captain (without):

My lord—

[*Enter CAPTAIN.*]

Holofernes: Well? Well? What brings thee here,
captain?

Captain:

I have done thy command, Holofernes; she waits
without.

Holofernes:

Who waits?

Captain:

The dancer, my lord, the dancer whom—

Holofernes: A plagué on her!

Captain:

But, my lord—

Holofernes: Tell her to get hence, thou fool!

Captain:

But Holofernes—

Holofernes:

Didst hear me? Tell her to get hence! I have
seen beauty

To-night, full blossomed as the rose of Assur!

SCENE III

The effect at the climax of the play; i. e., the killing of HOLOFERNES, is secured by placing him behind a curtain or screen. Thus, all that the audience sees is JUDITH'S raised sword.

Announcer: Thus Judith abode in the camp three days, and went out in the night into the valley of Bethulia. . . . And when she came out, she besought the

Lord God of Israel to direct her way. . . . And on the fourth day Holofernes made a feast and said: "Go, now, and persuade this Hebrew woman, that she come unto us and eat and drink with us."

Holofernes:

Boy, it waxeth late. She is not come.

Thou didst see her, and give my command?

Boy: I did, Holofernes, my lord.

Holofernes:

Perchance thou didst not say 'twas my *command*.

Boy:

Nay, good my lord, methought the woman knew
Thy lightest wish should be obeyed; and so
I gave thy message, and left.

Holofernes: Look from the tent.

What sign of her?

Boy: None, good my lord. The night
Is bright with stars; the moon sails boldly forth
And sets its course for yonder distant hills.
I see her tent gleam wanly in the dusk
Below the ramparts of Bethulia.
Yet no one cometh forth.

Holofernes: Go once again!

Boy:

Now, my lord?

Holofernes: Aye, now! Tell her I wait.
(A thing whereto I am most unaccustomed!)
Get thee gone.

Boy: I go, my lord.

[Exit Boy.]

Holofernes:

O Judith,

Judith of Bethulia! What manner of woman
Art thou, thus to make light of my command?
And now, forsooth, what manner of man am I,

To have a heart so easily wrought upon
That I have set a guard about thy tent,
Protecting thee as though thou wert my child!
Fie, Holofernes, thou art but a weakling!
I, who should launch mine army on yon city
To put it to the sword, sit idly here,
And all the while my captains look on me,
Smiling a scorn they dare not boldly show!
And all because a woman cometh here
To work some magic of her kind upon me!
Agh! I did think that I was too adept
Thus to be snared like any stripling lad!
Ha! What a fool am I—she's but a woman;
And I shall give her welcome of a kind
Whereof her beauty merits; Here, thou fellow!
[*Enter SERVANT.*]

Wine. My silken robe. Now get thee gone.
Hold—ah, let the musicians play, but softly, fellow!

Servant:

Aye, good my lord.

Holofernes: To-night I'd be alone.

Set guards about my tent. Admit no man.

No matter what his business. Do my command.

Servant:

It shall be done, my lord. [Exit SERVANT.]

[*Soft music in a moment.*]

Holofernes:

And still I wait! Perchance she will not come.

Perchance she's fled—to tell a mocking world

How she did come alone into my tent

And win me to her will; drive thoughts of war

From out my mind; make strangely merciful

This hardened soldier's heart; make me sit idle

The while mine army chafes at the delay—

Captain (outside):

Ho, my lord!

Holofernes: Who comes?

Captain: Ramon, thy captain.

Holofernes:

Admit him.

[*Enter CAPTAIN.*]

Captain:

The guard refused me entrance, Holofernes.

Holofernes:

Well, thy business. Quickly.

Captain:

Good my lord,

I bring these tidings; we asked surrender of the city—

Holofernes:

What say they?

Captain: Defiance, my lord. No word of surrender.

Holofernes:

Hmm. 'Tis strange how long they do resist us.

Captain:

Four days ago, my lord, I had report

That on the morrow they would open the gates.

What brings this sudden change, this bold defiance?

Holofernes (angry):

How should I know? I am not in Bethulia!

Captain:

My lord, should we attack, the gates would fall.

I wait thy word.

Holofernes: Well, come upon the morrow.

Captain:

Thine army restless grows.

Holofernes: Enough. Begone!

Captain:

My lord, one word with thee before I go.

Forgive my boldness, but this must be said:

This woman, this Hebrew who did come to see thee—

Beware, my lord! Her visit bodes no good.

'Tis true she's fair, but—

Holofernes: Captain! I bid thee go!

Captain:

The attack, my lord?

Holofernes: The attack shall wait on me!

Begone!

Captain:

If thy delay should reach the king, my lord—

Holofernes: Go! Or thou shall feel this sword—

[*Exit CAPTAIN. Pause.*]

How boldly he spake, even to my face!

Ah, Judith, thou hast cost me much. To-night

Thou'lt pay the debt. I am a fool no more.

Come, Holofernes, be thyself again!

[*Enter SERVANT.*]

Servant:

My lord, there is a woman who would see thee.

Holofernes:

A woman! Let her enter. [*Exit SERVANT.*]

Servant (outside):

The general bids thee enter. [*Enter JUDITH.*]

Holofernes:

Ah, Judith of Bethulia, I have been waiting.

Judith:

My lord hath sent for me. What is thy will?

Holofernes:

Sit by me. How fair thou art to-night!

Perchance thou hast stolen the radiance of the moon

To set within thine eyes?

Judith:

Thy tongue, my lord,

Is subtler far, than when I saw thee last.

Holofernes:

Still mocking me?

Judith: Nay, but I understand thee.

Holofernes:

Then sit here by me, as I bid thee, Judith.

[*Music off-stage.*]

Judith:

Music, my lord? And all this in my honour?

Thy brodered robe, thy jewelled sword beside thee.

Wine and—

Holofernes: Aye, drink with me. To thy beauty.

Judith:

Nay, to thy courage, who dares to be merciful.

Holofernes:

'Tis true I've spared thy city these four days.

Judith, wherefore do they resist so boldly?

Judith:

How should I know, my lord?

Holofernes: They hope thou wilt win me.

Aye 'tis the truth! Thou wert sent to snare my heart,
And cast thy spell about me. To-night 'tis broken.

Judith:

What wild words, my lord! I understand not.

Holofernes:

Surely thou knowest why I sent for thee.

Judith:

To tell me this?

Holofernes: Thou hast a debt to pay.

Ha! Thou hast made a fool of Holofernes,
A laughing stock, the jest of all my men!

Judith:

What idle talk! when I have seen thee once—

And then, to have a dozen words with thee!

A fool? Thou art made a fool too lightly.

Holofernes:

To-morrow, Judith, thy city falls before me.

To-night—we'll hold a feast of victory.

Thou and I, and no man here beside us.

Come, raise thy cup; I'll give a toast to thee:

To Holofernes, conquerer of Judea—

And Judith— [Toasts her.]

Judith: His mistress. Is that the toast, my lord?

Holofernes:

Boldly said, O Judith of Bethulia!

Judith:

I'll drink to that; come, raise thy cup to mine.

Holofernes:

Ah, woman, I know thee; thou art like the
rest.

Thou wouldest have my favour; thou knowest I
can protect thee.

Judith:

Well, Holofernes, would I not be a fool,

To spurn protection in such desperate times?

Holofernes:

Thou art frank, my love.

Judith: Ha! No more frank than thou.

Holofernes:

Ha, 'tis a strange night of romance, my sweet!

Judith:

Holofernes, loosen thy sword; it gives thee

Too warlike an air; too stern and bold for love.

Holofernes:

So sudden bold *thou* art, I do not know thee,

O Judith!

Judith: Let me see thy sword. (*He gives it to
her.*) The jewels

So rich upon the hilt; the sword of a king!

Nay, thou shalt be a king, my Holofernes—
And I shall be thy queen?

Holofernes: I'll drink to that!
Come! Pledge it with a kiss. [*He kisses her.*]

Judith: Now fill thy cup—
Here—to the brim; I'll fill it—drink to my toast:
To Holofernes—King of the Assyrians!

Holofernes:
Judith, I know not if it be the wine,
Or thou, that hath so set my heart on fire
With fierce ambition—and with fiercer passion.
King of the Assyrians! It is a title
I ne'er had thought on.

Judith: Yet it shall be thine.
But come, my love, ye drink too cautiously;
Art thou a soldier, my lord, to be so timid?

Holofernes:
I, timid? I, who can drain a cask of wine?
Pour me again; aye, full—to the very brim.
And then—this kiss to seal it.

Judith: Look, my lord.
When thou art king, thou wilt not then forget me?

Holofernes:
Forget thee? I—I— Soon I'll forget my name,
If I drain all the wine thou pourest for me!

Judith:
Conquered so soon, my lord? A soldier, too!
For shame! Even the Hebrews drink more lustily
than thou!

Holofernes:
Come! Drink with me! Thou hast not raised
thy cup.

Judith:
Rest thee a while, my love; I'll dance for thee.

Holofernes:

Dance for me; aye, dance for me, Judith!

Judith:

Give me thy sword again. It is a dance
Of war, to celebrate thy victory!

Holofernes:

My sword is thine.

Judith: Fiercer music, my lord!

Holofernes:

Ho, musicians!

Judith: Where sit they, my lord?

Holofernes: Back of yon curtains.

Ho, fellows! Music of war! (*Music changes.*)

Now dance for me! [*JUDITH dances.*]

Ah, body of white—like windswept birches at even!
Fiercely—fiercely, my love—even as my passion.

Judith:

My lord, the city falls upon the morrow?

Holofernes:

Upon the morrow, Judith! What care we?

Judith:

Naught, my lord! Naught!

[*She ceases her dance.*]

Holofernes:

Thou hast ceased thy dance.—Judith! What
means yon sword—

Raised o'er me—in menace! Judith!

[*The audience sees JUDITH standing over him with
upraised sword. Then the lights go out; and
HOLOFERNES' cry of death is heard in the
darkness.*]

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